

*Some Historical Notes on George Herbert Mead's Theory of Education*

Modern science is research science, writes George Herbert Mead in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*,<sup>1</sup> and that raises problems for traditional philosophy, calling its concepts and doctrines into question. Research science is hypothetical learning; concepts must be tested and cannot be assured; theories are not dogmas, but rather temporary working hypotheses in the light of existent, present experiences and facts. This means that every postulate can turn into a problem; all assumptions are valid only "from the point of view of the science of the time" (Mead 1936, p. 265).<sup>2</sup> Scientific inquiry in this sense begins with the Renaissance and finally gains ascendancy in the nineteenth century. The consequences for philosophy are grave: "truth" is now a "working" truth that is temporal and transitory; the philosophy of "being" becomes history; and "society" can no longer be understood on the basis of feudal theories. Philosophy can interpret scientific results (ibid., p. 343), but it can neither replace them nor offer alternatives to them.

One solution to this situation, says Mead, was the philosophy of Pragmatism as developed by William James and John Dewey at the turn of the century (ibid., p. 344f.). One of its central insights relates to the theory of scientific experimental or hypothetical learning, which Mead expands to develop a general model of education. "Research science" and "education" are

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<sup>1</sup> *Movements of Thought*, published after Mead's death, is based for the most part on stenographic notes from Mead's lectures for undergraduate students at the University of Chicago. Mead never prepared these lectures for publication. The standard lecture on *Movements of Thought in the 19th Century* was held nineteen times between the summer of 1901 and spring 1930 (Lewis/Smith 1980, App. 1,2). Mead's keen historical interest found one of its roots in Wilhelm Dilthey's lectures on "History of Philosophy," which Mead attended in Berlin in the summer semester of 1891. In the winter semester of 1890/91 Mead also attended Friedrich Paulsen's lectures on education. Mead studied in Leipzig and Berlin from 1888 to 1891.

<sup>2</sup> "Science starts with certain postulates, but does not assume they are not to be touched. There is no phase of the world as we know it in which a problem may not arise, and the scientist is anxious to find such a problem. He is interested not merely in giving a systematic view of the world from a science already established but in working out problems that arise. This is the attitude of research science" (Mead 1936, pp. 265/266).

not two separate areas. They both refer to an identical experience. Pragmatism calls upon two sources:

”The sources of the pragmatic doctrine are these: one is *behavioristic psychology*, which enables one to put intelligence in its proper place within the conduct of form, and to state that intelligence in terms of the activity of the form itself; the other is the *research process*, the scientific technique, which comes back to the testing of a hypothesis by its working... If we connect these two by recognizing that the testing in its working-out means the setting-free of inhibited acts and processes, we can see that both of them lead up to ... a doctrine ..., and that perhaps the most important phase of it is this: that the process of knowing lies inside of the process of conduct” (ibid., p. 351/352: italics added here).

For this reason, writes Mead, pragmatism has been spoken of as a practical sort of philosophy, a sort of ”bread-and-butter philosophy” (ibid., p. 352). It does not distinguish between thought and being or between knowledge and action; ”it brings the process of thought, of knowledge, inside of conduct” (ibid., p. 352). The theory is warranted on the basis of the research process or learning through hypotheses on the one hand, and on the psychology of Behaviorism as understood by John Dewey and William James (ibid., p. 392ff.) on the other.<sup>3</sup> This is not John Watson’s theory of conditioned learning based on his ”behaviorist manifesto” of 1913,<sup>4</sup> but rather a theory of intelligent adaptation that sees experience as a temporal sequence (ibid., p. 392) and consciousness as emerging from public communication, without rigorously rejecting intentionality (ibid., p. 399ff).<sup>5</sup>

One of the main influences on the development of Pragmatism was the shift in the nature of work in the rapidly developing industrial society. The growing division of labor was concurrent with the processes of urbanization and the attendant new formation of the public consciousness. It was only in the modern city that the individual could free himself from feudal control, as a worker receiving money in return for his services. The wage belonged to him in terms of his own effort, under no feudal conditions at all (ibid., p. 175). With the city, new forms of social control had to be built up (ibid., p. 176) that could be neither feudal nor ecclesiastical. This de-

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<sup>3</sup> Starting with: William James: On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology. In: *Mind* 9 (1884), pp. 1-26. (Wozniak 1993a).

<sup>4</sup> John B. Watson: Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It. In: *Psychological Review* 20 (1913), pp. 157-177. (Wozniak 1993a). Watson’s manifesto was based on animal psychology of the nineteenth century as well as on experimental psychology as represented, for example, by the work of Baldwin.

scription had one of its roots in Georg Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes*,<sup>6</sup> which Mead had reviewed in the 1900/1901 volume of the *Journal of Political Economy*.

In that work, Simmel (1989, p. 379ff.) had laid out how the historical departure from an agrarian economy and the manorial system brought with it the "freeing of the individual" (ibid., p. 138) under the conditions of the "non-determined existence of the city" (ibid., p. 596). For Simmel, fundamental to the public forms of the urban existence is individual and social "differentiation" (ibid., p. 631). The classical view of society, as a closed entity or political "body" that incorporates individuals in a lasting grip, no longer holds. We can also no longer view individuals as ultimate, indivisible "monads" that are untouched by the process of their experience. Simmel sees differentiation as both spatial and temporal; it occurs both in coexistence and in succession (ibid., p. 369), which can be observed in the division of labor as well as in the phenomena of fashions.

Similarly, Mead holds that the gradual and continuous emergence of capitalistic industrial society fundamentally changed the social situation. Society, and thus education, can longer be understood according to the pattern of the "ancient house" (Mead 1936, p. 185), meaning closed experience and static social forms. Social dynamics entered not only with industry, but also with the modern economy oriented towards an unlimited market. The new "economic community" of the nineteenth century was more universal than any church, and it had no need for metaphysical justifications (ibid., pp. 187/188). "Also, it brought together people who were separated nationally, in language, in customs" (ibid., p. 188).

"Society," however, is not the same thing as "market." In contrast to Malthus, Mead makes it clear that freedom of exchange is not based on "natural laws" of economy. Work and capital do not follow the simple tendencies of unceasing growth of wealth as well as increasing impoverishment, but instead must be seen upon the background of increasing differentiation and

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<sup>5</sup> The space about us is public, while intentions are private: "The intent which the person has is not evident to the other person. He may make a guess at it, but it is only the person ... who knows definitely what he intends to do" (Mead 1936, p. 401).

<sup>6</sup> The first edition was published in 1900 by Duncker&Humblot, Leipzig; a second expanded edition appeared in 1907. An English translation was published in 1990, co-translated by David Frisby (*The Philosophy of Money*, second edition, New York: Routledge 1995). One of the main chapters was published in English as early as 1900 (Simmel 1899-1900).

ongoing problem solving (ibid., p. 194ff.). "Societies develop ... by adjusting themselves to the problems they find before them" (ibid., pp. 365/366). Social adaptation is always intelligent adaptation and therefore a process of continuous learning.

"When we reach the human form with its capacity for indicating what is important in a situation, through the process of analysis; when we get to the position in which a mind can arise in the individual form, that is, where the individual can come back upon himself and stimulate himself just as he stimulates others; where the individual can call out in himself the attitude of the whole group; where he can acquire the knowledge that belongs to the whole community; where he can respond as the whole community responds under certain conditions when they direct this organized intelligence toward particular end; then we have this process which provides solutions for problems working in a self-conscious way" (ibid., p. 366).

Mead is trying to connect the entire evolutionary process with social organization (ibid., p. 372) and adaptation with intelligence.<sup>7</sup> Modern society requires intelligent forms of social control that must go beyond simple historical habits and patterns. Society is thus *cooperation*, which is to be understood as a highly complex activity based upon humans' ability to take the attitude of the group to which they belong, and it is not merely based upon gain or loss (ibid., p. 375). "Thinking" refers to "public consideration"; "it is taking the attitude of others, talking to other people, and then replying in their language. That is what constitutes thinking" (ibid., pp. 375/376).<sup>8</sup>

A central focus of this theory, and the subject of the present paper, is the question of how education, democracy, and society are connected. There has been little reception of Mead in the field of education internationally, and practically no investigation of his theory of education.<sup>9</sup> The linking of Mead with Symbolic Interactionism<sup>10</sup> prevented for the most part attention to Mead's theory of education or placed it in the field occupied by John Dewey, namely the relation be-

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<sup>7</sup> The basic idea of "general intelligence" has its roots in animal psychology of the nineteenth century (Lubbock 1882, Chapter 9; see also Thorndike 1898).

<sup>8</sup> On the construction of the *social mind*, compare Valsiner/Van der Veer (2000).

<sup>9</sup> In contrast to Dewey there is astonishingly little research on Mead. No recent dissertations are available on Mead's education theory. Only one of four older dissertations, by Paul Ringer III (University of Carolina 1977), has been published in part (Ringer III 1980 and 1980a). There have appeared occasional purely apologetic papers (such as Misumi 1933). Even the relation between the education theories of Mead and Dewey has been little discussed (Wynne 1952, Dennis/Stickel 1981). The work of Gert Biesta (1996) alone meets current standards of research.

<sup>10</sup> Ensuing from Anselm Strauss' Mead edition (1956); see also Rose (1962), Manis/Meltzer (1972), and similar readers.

tween education and democracy. In the following, I attempt to reconstruct the contemporary context of these issues (section 1) and then discuss some aspects of social theory as they were treated in the intellectual context of which Mead was a part (section 2). Finally, I will examine Mead's peculiar theory of education, which - like many areas of his work - exists only in fragments and nevertheless is far more deserving of attention than has been realized to date (section 3). Mead dealt intensively with pedagogical problems. His first publication relevant to education goes back to the year 1896, and it is not coincidentally devoted to the relation of "play" to "education" (Mead 1896).<sup>11</sup>

### *1. Society, Democracy, and Education*

Educational reform has been a public issue in the United States since the mid nineteenth century. Charles William Eliot spoke of "new education" as early as 1869, the year of his inauguration as president of Harvard University.<sup>12</sup> He demanded a broadening and deepening of higher education in the United States that would have a place for the natural sciences, foreign languages, and political economy.<sup>13</sup> Eliot, president of Harvard for 40 years,<sup>13</sup> held to a concept of higher education that would leave the European conception of "the cultivated man" and "educating the self" behind and focus instead on efficiency and usefulness for society (Eliot 1903). He criticized the state of the field of education: "The history of education is full of still-born theories; the literature of the subject is largely made up of theorizing; whoever reads it much will turn with infinite relief to the lessons of experience" (Eliot 1869, p. 204). The speculative science of education was not in a position to deal with the question of how a democratic education could be developed.

John Dewey referred to Eliot in his contributions to Paul Monroe's<sup>14</sup> *Cyclopedia of Education*,<sup>15</sup> the first large summary and lexical organization of the field of American education, and

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<sup>11</sup> This paper was originally presented as an address at the Chicago Commons on May 1, 1896. Mead's many works on education were never published separately as such. But all of Mead's published works, as well as unpublished essays and fragments and student notes on Mead's courses held in collection but not prepared for publication, are available on the Internet at *George's Page: A Mead Project Site at Brock University's Sociology Department*: ([http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/mead/mead\\_biblio.html](http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/mead/mead_biblio.html))

<sup>12</sup> In: *Atlantic Monthly* (February, March 1869).

<sup>13</sup> First outlined in: *What is a Liberal Education?* (*The Century*, June 1884) (Eliot 1909a, pp. 87-122).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Monroe (1869-1947) completed his Ph.D. in 1897 at the University of Chicago. At Teachers College, Columbia University, he was professor of education from 1902 until his retirement in 1938. He also served as direc-

with it, the "new" education.<sup>16</sup> Monroe's *Cyclopedia* (published 1911 to 1914) was the first education encyclopedia to use in print the term "philosophy of education" and to include the entry "democracy and education," which Dewey understood as follows: Democracy and education are connected in two ways. Not only does a democracy require educated citizens for purposes of self-perpetuation, but also democratic ideals themselves shape education, namely the form and methods of the public schools (Dewey 1985, p. 417/418). The prerequisite is respect of the individual, which means that feudal authority must be overcome in the process of societal differentiation.

"Democracy inevitably carries with it increased respect for the individual as individual, greater opportunity for freedom, independence and initiative in conduct and thought, and correspondingly increased demand for fraternal regard and for self-imposed and voluntarily borne responsibilities" (ibid., p. 418).

Eliot's influence included outlining the central concerns of the "new education." They were intended to highlight the differences between American and British or European pedagogy, such as with regard to freedom in education, the greater individualization of teaching, and particularly the function of education in a democratic society.<sup>17</sup> The first two volumes of the *Cyclopedia* appeared in 1911, one year after the publication of *How We Think*, Dewey's examination of the cognitive psychology basis of the "new education." Eliot is one of the sources of the famous formula that states that education is the continuous reconstruction of experience (Dewey 1985, p. 431).<sup>18</sup> Dewey describes the basis for this formula, which also derives from Mead's hypothetical learning, as follows:

"So far we have considered education from the standpoint of its place and function in societies that make use of it to secure the conservation and expansion of their own ideals. We may, of course, also regard the process from the standpoint of the immature beings

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tor of the *School of Education* at Teachers College (1915-1923) and of the *International Institute* after 1923. In both functions, his work served to disseminate the American "new education."

<sup>15</sup> Paul Monroe: *A Cyclopedia of Education*. Vol. 1-5. New York: Macmillian Co., 1911-1914. Compare Brickman/Cordasco (1970).

<sup>16</sup> The key role in the public campaign for *new education* was played by the Committee of Ten, appointed in 1892 by the National Education Association (NEA) to address the question of high school education (Cremin 1961, p. 92sq.). The committee was chaired by Eliot. Between 1893 and 1911, "new education" became a much-cited catchword, and it was interpreted variously also independently of Eliot's or Dewey's conceptions.

<sup>17</sup> *Liberty in Education* (Speech before the Nineteenth Century Club of New York 1886); *Undesirable and Desirable Uniformity in Schools* (Address given to the National Educational Association, Saratoga, July 12, 1892); *The Function of Education in Democratic Society* (An address delivered before the Brooklyn Institute on October 2, 1897) (Eliot 1909a, pp. 123-148; 271-300; 399-418).

<sup>18</sup> Article on "Education" in the first volume of Monroe's *Cyclopedia* (Dewey 1985, pp. 425-434).

who at a given time are being transformed into social members, to sustain the community type of life. So viewed, *education may be defined as a process of the continuous reconstruction of experience* with the purpose of widening and deepening its social content, while, at the same time, the individual gains control of the methods involved” (ibid.; italics added here).

Later Mead examines just wherein this ”reconstructive” activity of the individual in a democratic society lies. The single individual cannot oppose society and impose his will upon it; society therefore restricts free will. But there is no problem that has not been defined by individuals, just as there are no research problems that did not originate with individual researchers.<sup>19</sup> All problems of relevance are communicated socially, but worked out individually. No project to find a solution emerges simply right out of the ”middle of society,” which exists only in a metaphorical sense.

”Here is a certain situation. We all agree to that. What can be done about it? The step which can be taken under those circumstances is some project which can meet that particular problem. That, then, becomes a basis for social reaction. It has to be accepted by the community. The individual puts his problem in universal form. The thing he presents is essentially a social affair which arises through his thinking, his idea” (Mead 1938, p. 662squ.).

Individuality is no longer the ”inner” counter-world to ”external” society, as in the European tradition of personal self-cultivation. The dualism of individual and society itself comes into question, for society is not a ”thing” confronting the individual, but rather complex interactions between individuals and groups. All social institutions or methods are *solutions to problems*. They can be changed as new problems and new solutions arise. This means that it is impossible to relate education to inner cultivation. This is the essential stepping off point of the Pragmatist theory of education; education refers to social interaction, which is not something that can see itself as an unquestioned authority.

Eliot criticized the great rift between self-cultivation and usefulness to society. He saw society as the natural setting for all educational concerns (Eliot 1909, p. 39) and urged that the concept must change: namely, there must be an end to the overemphasis on the great texts of cultural history and thus the search for values in the past. New education must include modern lan-

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<sup>19</sup> ”Observation, hypothesis, and experiment lie ... in the biographies of the individual, and, ... so do the emphases of attention which mark analysis and the process of so-called logical thinking” (Mead 1938, p. 67).

guages, specialization,<sup>20</sup> and finally, encourage innovative problem-solving or "constructive imagination" (ibid., pp. 40ff., 45).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, education must address the students' own self-activity and individuality, he wrote in 1894.<sup>22</sup> "In school and college alike the really effective teaching ... is what is addressed to each individual pupil" (Eliot 1909a, p. 318). Instruction, wrote Dewey in 1900,<sup>23</sup> should not merely conserve knowledge, conveying the idea that there are no doubt, no difficulties, and no necessity to think further (Dewey 1916, p. 189ff.).

In January 1896 the *University Elementary School* of the newly founded University of Chicago opened under the direction of Alice and John Dewey. The school was also called the *Laboratory School*, to indicate the school's character of a "laboratory" in which the child was to take an active part, learning through doing and discovering. Although he had not coined the term,<sup>24</sup> Eliot had placed the expression "laboratory method" quite prominently two years previously in an essay on "The Unity of Educational Reform" in connection with science instruction:

"The old-fashioned method of teaching science by means of illustrated books and demonstrative lectures has been superseded, from the kindergarten through the university, *by the laboratory method*, in which each pupil, no matter whether he has been three years old or twenty-three, works with his own hands, and is taught to use his own senses" (Eliot 1909a, pp. 318/319; italics added here).

One of the opponents of this theory of education was Matthew Arnold, whose "humanistic" theory of the forming of the mind and the cultivation of man - developed 1869 in *Culture and*

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<sup>20</sup> "Culture ... can no longer imply a knowledge of everything – not even a little knowledge of everything. It must be content with general knowledge of some things, and a real mastery of some small portions of the human store" (Eliot 1909, S. 45).

<sup>21</sup> "Constructive imagination is the great power of the poet as well as of the artist; and the nineteenth century has convinced us that it is also the great power of the man of science, the investigator, and the natural philosopher. What gives every great naturalist or physicist his epoch-making results is precisely the imaginative power by which he deduces from masses of facts the guiding hypotheses or principles" (Eliot 1909, p. 48f.).

<sup>22</sup> Charles William Eliot: *The Unity of Educational Reform*. In: *Educational Reform* (October, 1894). (Eliot 1909a, pp. 313-339).

<sup>23</sup> *Some Stages of Logical Thought*. In: *Philosophical Review* 9, 5 (Sept 1900), pp. 465-489). (Dewey 1916, pp. 183-219).

<sup>24</sup> Dewey defined "laboratory" in 1900 in the essay *Some Stages of Logical Thought* as follows: "In the laboratory there is no question of proving that things are just thus and so, or that we must accept or reject a given statement; there is simply an interest in finding out what sort of things we are dealing with. Any quality or change that presents itself may be on object of investigation, or may suggest a conclusion; for it is to be judged, not be reference to pre-existent truths, but by its suggestiveness, by what it may lead to. The mind is open to inquiry in any direction" (Dewey 1916, p. 208).



*Anarchy*<sup>25</sup> - was to be rejected in favor of a concept of education that has room for industrial training and scientific research and technology as well as languages and history, thus departing from the self-understanding of the humanities as the "true bearers" of culture. The humanities, wrote Dewey (1985, p. 406), were typically blind to the fundamental importance of knowledge of nature "as a necessary condition of reaching both all-round individual development and an equitable social improvement."

Eliot had written in 1894, effective power in action is the true end of education rather than the storing up of information, or the mere cultivation of faculties which are mainly receptive, discriminating, or critical, i.e. an education that does not address the practical at all (Eliot (1894/1909a, p. 323). This would require very extensive changes in curricula and teaching methods, changes that made up what was called the "new education." Dewey presented a proposal for this change in his article on the course of study for Monroe's *Cyclopedia*<sup>26</sup>. According to Dewey curriculum construction<sup>27</sup> must master three main problems:

- the significance of subject-matter in general;
- its relation to experience;
- its classification (ibid., p. 396).

The contents of instruction must be of demonstrated significance and not base merely upon the traditional canon. Curriculum contents must also be able to be connected to the students' experience, and they must be based upon a convincing classification that does not simply reproduce traditional curricula. Teaching materials and lesson plans - the instruments of instruction and learning - should not take on autonomous importance, but must remain linked to the experience context. They are social products, not school media exclusively. Children are also not empty slates with none of their own experience, learning simply what the school offers.

"The experience of pupils is already more or less socialized. It has been built up through suggestions and interpretations derived from the social groups of which the child is already a member. It is already saturated with social values that are akin to these presented in the studies of the curriculum" (ibid., p. 400).

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London 1869).

<sup>26</sup> "Theory of Course of Study" (Dewey 1985, pp. 395-404).

<sup>27</sup> Discussed at the end of Dewey: *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902).

This understanding of the socialized child, who does not enter school as a "tabula rasa,"<sup>28</sup> goes back to Charles Cooley's (1902, 1909)<sup>29</sup> theory of the primary group, which was later developed further by William Thomas. "Primary groups" are all groups or social associations in which and through which the child builds up his first and fundamental experiences. These experiences are essential in forming the social nature, ideals, and worldview of the adult person. A person's first learning does not take place in the school; children are from the start enmeshed in social contexts. Cooley also developed further the idea of the "social self," which would overcome the Cartesian gap between inner and external world. Children are not, as according to Rousseau, *first* nature and *then* society; they are from the start, and always, active learners, society-minded, if society is understood as their primary social relationships. Children thus learn democracy within their primary culture.

The facts of this matter demanded a theoretical explanation. In 1916, in *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey accused the theoretical tradition in pedagogy in its entirety, not only the German tradition, of lacking a democratic basis. According to Dewey, it presupposed a feudal society based on paternal and timeless principles, justifying a hierarchical education that was inappropriate for a developing democratic society (Oelkers 2004). Mead (1964, p. 210) called it "philosophic servitude" that was inappropriate for free communities, which can choose their own philosophies and need not rely upon sacrosanct traditions (ibid., p. 374). Here the peculiarities of the American experience were taken into account:<sup>30</sup>

"Popular education and economic opportunity sprang naturally from its [*meaning the American; J.O.*] social attitude and its geographical situation. It was the distillation of the democracy inherent in Calvinism and the Industrial Revolution at liberty to expand and proliferate for a century without the social problems which beset it in Europe. The American pioneer was spiritually stripped for the material conquest of a continent and the formation of a democratic community" (ibid., pp. 374/375).

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<sup>28</sup> The *tabula rasa* doctrine of perception was replaced by Mead (1938, p. 135) with a theory of Symbolic Socialization.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) studied and taught at the University of Michigan (Ph.D, 1894), which he never left for any significant length of time. His papers include student notebooks from 1893-1894 on lectures given by John Dewey. Dewey had been appointed an instructor in philosophy and psychology, and with the exception of the academic year 1888-89, when he served as professor of philosophy at the University of Minnesota, Dewey spent the next 10 years at Michigan. Cooley taught in the sociology department at the University of Michigan from 1892 onwards.

<sup>30</sup> *The Philosophies of Royce, James, and Dewey in their American Setting* (*International Journal of Ethics* 40 (1929/1930, pp. 211-231) (Mead 1930; Mead 1964, pp. 371-391).

The examples chosen by Dewey in *Democracy and Education* are highly pertinent: neither Herbart and Hegel, nor Pestalozzi, nor Fröbel present a democratic theory of education. Instead they speak of "The Education of Man,"<sup>31</sup> which can be applied in any type of societal system. The main problem for the authors in the Pragmatist school was the formulation of a democratic theory of education independent of these traditions that would correlate with the experiences of democratic society. Modern in contrast to ancient democracy is based upon interchange between groups and individuals (Mead 1934, p. 286ff.). The issue is thus how education can become interchange of ideas, conversation, belonging to a "universe of discourse" (ibid., p. 284) without following an agenda of political propaganda (ibid., p. 287).

The American literature as well often overlooks the fact that Dewey's *Democracy and Education* did not mark the beginning of the discussion on democratization. From the time of Eliot's plea for the "new education," there were continuous references to the necessity to adapt programs and experiences of schools at all levels to democracy and, more specifically, to democratic forms of life. "New education" (Palmer 1887) was not seen only as a change in methods, but - in a much broader sense - as a change in the political structure of education. Well-known examples of the political discourse include Booker T. Washington's<sup>32</sup> address (1896) on equality of black pupils as a precondition for democratic development of the school (Washington 1932), Charles Eliot's plea (1897) for general and equal school standards that would be necessary if education was to qualify as a function of a democratic society (Eliot 1909a, pp. 399-418), and Charles Cooley's (1918) utilization of the primary group as a foundation of a democratic school culture. The fundamental idea of public education for all children under republican circumstances goes back to the founding of the United States (Tröhler 2001). The idea typically combines equal access to education with strong normative convictions that assume political democracy.

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<sup>31</sup> Fröbel's major theoretical work, *Die Menschenerziehung* [The Education of Man] of 1826, develops a romantic, highly speculative view of the child and the cosmos that is not amenable to empirical testing and, at the same time, takes no reference to social context. Dewey rejects wholeheartedly Froebel's idealistic and romantic view on development and symbolism.

<sup>32</sup> Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), educator and reformer, was born a slave in Virginia, but after the Emancipation received an education at *Hampton Institute* in Norfolk, working as a janitor to help pay expenses. In 1881 he was selected to head the *Tuskegee Institute* (now Tuskegee University), an industrial institute for rural African Americans. The institute became a monument to Washington's life's work in education, and he became the national spokesman of the black minority. A study on character building appeared in 1902: Washington, Booker T. *Character Building: Being Addresses Delivered on Sunday Evenings to the Students of Tuskegee Institute* (New York, 1902).

Authors like George Herbert Mead (1899, 1910), John Dewey (1903), or Ella Flagg Young (1903) very early related the theory of education to the democratic form of life, that is, to social exchange and free interaction. Mead formulated the idea that all social reform can be seen as a political and educational "working hypothesis" that must stand the test of experience without guarantees on the basis of metaphysics or philosophy of history like in Hegelian or Marxists theories. The effect of pedagogical reforms becomes evident in the process of experience and not as the result of a plan of history that laid out the route *prior to* or *independently of* experience. Dewey in 1903 saw democracy as a condition for education, and Ella Flagg Young voted for the application of the "scientific method," or controlled learning through experience also (and precisely) in education.

The demand that education for democracy must itself be democratic can be traced back to reform pedagogy experiments that were conducted not only within the American *progressive education* movement, but also in the English *radical schools* between the wars (Blewitt 1934). Democratic procedures, such as voting and public discussions or criticism, were realized in the schools. Closely related is Dewey's idea that the school should be an embryonic society, anticipating on a small scale that which would be demanded later on the larger scale, particularly social behavior and a democratic attitude (Tanner 1997). A democratic education must also be based upon a democratic *theory* of education that is no longer fixated upon traditional authorities, but instead is capable of responding to the open process of democratic experience. Like all experience, therefore, the theory must be correctable and can no longer be formulated independently of the time or context.

A theory of education thus requires a social theory. The question of *how society is possible* brings us back to Georg Simmel.<sup>33</sup> Socialization [Vergesellschaftung], writes Simmel (1968, p. 24), is processes of interaction; society is nothing more than "the interactions arising among individuals" (ibid., p. 25). If education is also seen as cooperation, it can no longer be conceived of as "influencing," as was the case up to Herbertianism.<sup>34</sup> Mead (1938, p. 137) responded to Simmel's question and utilized it in order to develop a strictly social theory of education with the following basic tenet: "What has made human society possible has been a co-operation through communi-

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<sup>33</sup> *How is Society Possible?* (Simmel 1910).

<sup>34</sup> Pedagogical "influencing" or "Einwirkung" should be understood as one-way process in which the adult influences the child, with no feedback loop (Oelkers 1994).

cation and participation.” The goals and means of human life must be realized under the condition of social differentiation, and it is the ”*raison d’être* of the co-operative process” that individual goals cannot simply be transformed into social goals, but instead require negotiation. Otherwise, democracy would have no basis.

## 2. *Pragmatism and Social Theory*

Mead described in 1923<sup>35</sup> the ideal that underlies democracy: Democracy implies a highly complex social situation that is not simply given, but instead must be determined or socially tuned again and again. The theory calls for the development of an intelligent public sentiment upon the issues before the community.

”This is what democratic government means, for the issue does not actually exist at such, until the members of the community realize something of what it means to them individually and collectively. There cannot be self-government until there be an intelligent will expressed in the community, growing out of the intelligent attitudes of the individuals and groups in those experience the community exists. Our institutions are insofar democratic that when a public sentiment is definitely formed and expressed it is authoritative” (Mead 1964, pp. 257/258).

Of course, in practice this is quite rare; democracy cannot be seen as a social situation free from obstacles (ibid., p. 259) and full of harmony as in Owenites theories of society at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary, the ideal and reality of democracy must step apart to allow for continuous, cautious attempts to bring them into closer alignment. Mead sees the necessary condition for this as an education problem:

”The real hope of democracy ... lies in making the issues so immediate and practical that they can appear in the minds of the voter as his own problem” (ibid., p. 263).

The complexity of the social situation does not make this impossible; high differentiation does not contradict simplicity insofar as it affects what might be called the didactics of politics and thus the development of the public sentiment.

”The advance in the practice and theory of democracy depends upon the successful translation of questions of public policy into the immediate problems of the citizens. It is the intensive growth of social interrelations and intercommunications that alone render possible

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<sup>35</sup> *Scientific Method and the Moral Sciences* (*International Journal of Ethics* 33 (1923), pp. 229-247) (Mead 1964, pp. 248-266).

the recognition by the individual of the import for his social life of the corporate activity of the whole community. The task of intelligence is to use this growing consciousness of interdependence to formulate the problems of all, in terms of the problem of everyone" (ibid., pp. 263/264).

The weakness of the classical theory of society was that its basic concepts were bound to *static* elements. Organic or juristic metaphors, like "community" or "institution," were often used to illustrate these elements. If "society" is understood, however, as social interchange and thus transitory communication between individuals and groups - an idea also of Dewey (1985a, p. 92ff.) - then continuous learning and the adapting of action to ever-new circumstances becomes the fundamental task, provided that the social world surrounds what is problematic (Mead 1938, p. 55). Inclusion and exclusion, the two basic tasks of drawing social boundaries, are now no longer viewed as static, but rather as continuous problem solving. In this sense, experience and education are no longer different things, and the social is no longer a special condition for education, but is education itself. The fine-tuning of experience to ever-new situations of learning and acting *is* "education."

In Pragmatism, three main concepts were definitive for social theory:

- the theory of society as a learning process,
- the theory of time as uninterrupted continuation of experience,
- and the theory of evolution as continuous adaptation as intelligently as possible.

Philip Wiener (1949) pointed out early on that social evolution informed the Pragmatist theory of society, in the sense that the Pragmatists related Charles Darwin's concept of adaptation to social intelligence. Beside that it was Mead in particular who developed a theory of time that owes much to Henri Bergson<sup>36</sup> and starts out from the problem of continuity. Society is possible only insofar as it can perpetuate itself. If, however, social intelligence is possible only as constant new adaptations, then the fundamental question arises as to how continuity can be reconcilable with change.

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<sup>36</sup> Mead reviewed Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice* (Mead 1907) and examined his theory of time, which was in opposition to Kant, in many papers, most intensively in *The Philosophy of the Present* (Mead 1932) and in *Movements of Thought in Nineteenth Century* (Mead 1936, pp. 292-325). At the end of that work he wrote, "Bergson's attack upon science represents a misconception of its method and ideal. His flight to irrationalism is unnecessary" (ibid., p. 510) (compare here Moran 1996).

”Society” was understood at the end of the nineteenth century as *social differentiation* - a concept to which, in addition to Simmel, Emile Durkheim also contributed. For Durkheim social differentiation arises with the division of labor, growing mobility, and the heightened dynamics of culture. Durkheim wanted this process to be seen as an irrevocable fact, similar to the way that physics describes the laws of nature. Durkheim's idea of *faits sociaux* was challenged by Georg Simmel (1968) in particular, through the concept of social groups and identity-differentiating interfaces and transitions, although he did not connect this to an actual social learning theory. But indeed we can understand processes of social differentiation only when we relate them to *learning*, and not just view them as ”facts.”

The French sociologist Gabriel de Tarde<sup>37</sup> developed a fundamental theory of social learning. In 1890 he conceived of social interaction as *similitudes*, as the construction of similarity through imitation. The key learning process is imitation; innovation requires that there are enough imitations in the culture that society can never begin at ground zero (De Tarde 1993, p. 48ff.). The prerequisite of innovation is always *la stérilité relative d'imagination* (ibid., p. 50), or the impeded power of imitation. This is the only way that the issue of temporal continuity/contingency, which has been a problem not only since Luhmann,<sup>38</sup> can be handled. Learning involves association in temporal succession and therefore does not consist simply in enduring internalizations, as predicated for example by psychoanalysis. Association succeeds, says De Tarde, when social imitation<sup>39</sup> is directed towards that which is ”*utile, raisonnable ou belle*” (ibid., p. 53). Useful, rational, and beautiful things invite imitation and in this way determine the social learning process.

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<sup>37</sup> Gabriel de Tarde (1843-1904) was schooled at the Jesuit Collège in Sarlat and studied law in Paris. Up to 1894 he served as *juge d'Instruction* in Sarlat. From 1894, he directed the criminal statistics bureau at the Ministry of Justice in Paris. In 1900 de Tarde was appointed professor of modern philosophy at the Collège de France, where he taught until his death. De Tarde's scientific work began with a sociological critique of the extreme biological-causation theories of Cesare Lombroso (1836-1920) and his school, pointing out the importance of environment in criminal behavior (*La Criminalité comparée*, 1886). de Tarde became known in the United States in 1890, when *Les lois de l'imitation* [The Laws of Imitation] was published. Robert Park's and Ernest Burgess' *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, the definitive work for the first half of the twentieth century, ranks de Tarde's influence as equal to that of Emile Durkheim.

<sup>38</sup> Niklas Luhmann's (1927-1998), German sociologist and social systems theorist, famous formula of ”reduction of complexity” relates to de Tarde, for whom ”evolution” means deriving simplicity from complexity rather than the opposite process.

<sup>39</sup> *L'imitation est chose sociale* (De Tarde 1993, p. 54).

De Tarde is not known in the field of education, even to experts in the history of pedagogy. However, he was a significant influence on the Pragmatist theory of society, particularly on Dewey and Mead. Mead made various references to de Tarde, in particular to his concept of the "social self" (Mead 1982, p. 155f.), which Mead took over and developed further. In De Tarde's (1999) *Logique social* [Logic of the Social] he describes how reciprocity and the opposition between various imitations creates the social facts, which therefore do not simply exist as facts of a "second Nature." This society is not, it cannot be understood analogous to one "primary nature" as again Marxist theories are suggesting. "Society" must be conceived of as fundamentally different than nature; society is namely the effect of social interactions and the condition of differences. Heterogeneity always precedes homogeneity.

The relation to De Tarde's theory of social learning is less obvious, but for Pragmatism learning is also first that as understood by De Tarde, namely, "*suivant la nature des habitudes d'imitation déjà formées*" (De Tarde 1990, p. 55). This is the only way to achieve what Mead (1938, p. 26ff.) called in the *Philosophy of the Act* the "limits of the problematic". Sociality can not be understood as a single field of problems, which also means that the psychology of problem solving has social limitations: Our experience is not simply an experience of say, color, at this moment and color at the next moment. "Our experience is one something that is taking place," "there is such a thing as passage in experience" (ibid., p.85f.), and therefore experiences are related and thus never only isolated points. It is social interchange that makes "determinism" impossible (ibid., p. 153). The social world itself cannot become problematic; therefore, we must distinguish between "world" and the problematic areas of data of observation, both in the research process and in society alike (ibid., p. 31).

Social learning is never mere imitation, but it is rather, as Mead says, a "meeting of minds" (ibid., p. 52) or a *universe of discourse*, in which the interrelation and thus collective intelligence are determined ever anew.

"The universe of discourse which deals simply with the highest abstractions opens the door for the interrelationship of the different groups in their different characters. The universe of discourse within which people can express themselves makes possible the bringing-together of those organized attitudes which represent the life of these different communities into such a relationship that they can lead to a higher organization" (Mead 1934, p. 284).



In this way, society is relation and interaction, and not inclusion through descent. Ultimately, *everyone* belongs to the universe of discourse through which the intelligence of social relationships is organized. The prerequisites are reciprocity and feedback: "The elaboration, then, of the intelligence of the vertebrate form in human society is dependent upon the development of ... social reaction in which the individual can influence himself as he influences others" (Mead 1934, p. 243).

In general, experience can be understood as "passage" in spatiotemporal change (Mead 1938, p. 331).<sup>40</sup> The process of experience implies a chain of events that must be linked, or in other words, that do not in themselves provide continuity. Mead understands "process" generally as follows:

"What is involved in a process is not simply a continuity. This is given in extension. One event extends over other events. A process involves the past as determining the fixed conditions of that which is taking place, and it involves that which is taking place as maintaining itself by adjustment to the oncoming event - the future. Every *process* can be resolved into a mere *series of events* which determine one another, if we regard them as *past*; but at the *future edge of experience* there is content which reaches out ready to accept the control of that which is taking place, in still maintaining itself" (Mead 1938, pp. 343/344; italics added here).

For Mead social life is more than life as it is defined by the chemist and biologist, namely, not maintaining, but rather breaking through the causal chain (ibid., p. 344). Habit is always historical causality that can and must be changed through new events. Social experience is continuous adaptation under the condition that the unknown in the future can be utilized intelligently.<sup>41</sup> A loss of time, as in Rousseau's *Emile*,<sup>42</sup> must be rejected, for otherwise the flow of events could not be brought into the fragile stability that makes learning possible. However, duration is not an ultimate dimension: "It is only the process that lasts" (ibid., p. 345).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Passage does not involve a content that does not *pass*. It involves simply happening, a coming into being and going out. Change involves departure from a condition that must continue in some sense to fulfil the sense of change from that condition" (Mead 1938, p. 331).

<sup>41</sup> Only in this way is social creativity possible (compare here the contributions in: Gunter 1990).

<sup>42</sup> "Oserai-je exposer ici la plus grande, la plus importante, la plus utile règle de toute l'éducation? Ce n'est pas de gagner de tems, c'est d'en perdre" (Rousseau O.C. IV/ p. 323).

<sup>43</sup> "What distinguishes a process from a mere duration is that at the future edge of experience it merges with the emerging events in adjustment or control so that as a whole it is continuous with the future. What introduces the lasting character, as lasting, into experience is the inhibition within the process which exhibits the characters of the field of stimulation that are spatiotemporally distant. They are characters which answer to alternative responses when the individual has reached them" (Mead 1938, S. 345).

In *The Quest for Certainty* Dewey pointed out that "learning" means mastering the indeterminate nature of uncertain situations (Dewey 1988, p. 199). "Society" is simply the present given sum of problem solutions from which - at the future edge of experience - new problems arise. The social is thus always at the same time both order and process; what is seen as a datum at a particular point in time can become problematic directly afterwards; it is only that not *all* social facts can become problems simultaneously. Mead expressed this as follows in 1917:<sup>44</sup>

"The conception of a world of existence, then, is the result of the determination at the moment of the conditions of the solution of the given problems. These problems constitute the conditions of conduct, and the ends of conduct can only be determined as we realize the possibilities which changing conditions carry with them" (Mead 1964, p. 209).

As conditions change, the problem solutions are called into question, but new conditions are at the same time new opportunities for learning. From the perspective of the individual, learning is thus a process of researching, or discovering:

"The individual in his experiences is continually creating a world which becomes real through his discovery. Insofar as new conduct arises under the conditions made possible by his experience and his hypothesis the world, which may be made the test of reality, has been modified and enlarged" (ibid.).

The "future edge of experience" is not simply an unknown, but rather an event that is influenced by the given situation. Only in this way is the future more than mere fate, and only in this way can we make a serious assumption that experience can correct itself (Dewey 1988, p. 188). If knowledge is the basis for social interchange, then it must be in a dynamic form (ibid., p. 222), for otherwise, democracy would not be possible. Democracy demands continuous adjustment to ever-new situations that must be communicated intelligently and publicly. This already by itself makes learning fundamental especially learning that cannot rely on fundamental principles, dogmas, and the like. This does not mean that ideals are superfluous, but ideals provide aspirations rather than reality. And all ideals must in the end be confronted with realities that test them.

That the political form of learning should be *democracy* is simply the consequence of accepting the theory of evolution (Mead 1934, pp. 281ff.). In the light of the theory of evolution

society can no longer be seen a closed identity outside any process of adjustment. Society must "learn" its developments, and because if this it cannot be ruled in an authoritarian manner. For social developments there should be a fair exchange among the interests of the various groups, also participation in the common good is essential and there must be provisions for continuous new adjustments of institutions (Dewey 1985, pp. 102 sq.). The best political frame to these purposes is democracy, "democracy" understood not simply as competition of different groups with each other, but as a universal social form, or what Mead (1934, p. 282) called "universal society."

Dewey and Mead attempted to reach an understanding of education that is not pedagogy as an independent world outside society, which had been the case in the pedagogy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From Rousseau to Fröbel education was not related to "society" but instead to "nature" and to a space of experience as determined by nature and under control of educators (Oelkers 1993). This meant that society was seen with a pedagogical reservation, and as a consequence, education was attributed with the ability to give rise to the ultimate or "true" society of the future, not with the realities of the present. Society was construed in such a way that it accorded with pedagogical purposes. Dewey and Mead start out from the assumption of a democratic society and then relate education to it, not the other way round. The Pragmatist social theory does not point to a world that is external to education. Instead, it includes education in that social world, indeed as one of its conditions. A theory of this kind would not have been possible without a concept of time and process, of situation and intelligent adaptation, of experience and reconstruction, and therefore of learning and acting that does not regard these relations as dualisms.

### *3. Mead's Theory of Education*

For Mead as for Dewey, we must take into consideration that their ideas on education were gained from practical experience and put into theory parallel to experience. Mead followed Dewey in many of his educational and reform ventures and wrote a number of articles on progressive educational matters between the time he joined the Philosophy Department at Chicago and the First World War. He addressed in particular the topics of occupational training and indus-

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<sup>44</sup> "Scientific Method and Individual Thinker" (In: *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*. New

trial education. From that his term "industrial democracy" is originated. It does not overstate the case to say that Mead's educational experiences informed his social psychological theory. Theory and practice do not constitute contradictory elements that later must be set in relation to one another. Instead, what can be applied here is what Mead (1938, pp. 50ff.) in general called scientific reflection, or learning by discovery (compare Franzosa 1984). Social or education reform is for Mead, once again, dependent upon *working hypotheses* that are tested by experience and thus can succeed or fail. There is neither a general law of reform nor a pre-established optimum environment for education; every reform is nothing other than the attempt to reshape experience through working hypotheses.

This holds for all of the practical problems that Mead examined, namely for:

- social learning of children (Mead 1898),
- the basis for parents' associations (Mead 1903/04),
- the teaching of science in college (Mead 1906)
- the development of industrial education (Mead 1907/08),
- the policy of educational journals like the *Elementary School Teacher* (Mead 1907/08a),
- the educational situation in the public schools (Mead 1907/08b),
- relations between industrial education, the working man and the school (Mead 1908/09, Mead 1909)
- and not at least moral training in the schools (Mead 1908/09a).

Shortly after the Public Education Committee of the City Club of Chicago, chaired by Mead, had submitted its Report on Vocational Education in 1912, Mead wrote his major essay on *The Social Self* (Mead 1913), which sets out clearly the central idea of *Mind, Self, and Society* (Biesta 1996). This idea generalized the educational experiences and linked them with very extensive changes to education theory. One fundamental issue concerns how "mind" emerges, without - as in European pedagogy - placing it in opposition to "society." Mead's thesis starts from the premise that:

"Mind arises through communication by a conversation of gestures in a social process or context of experience - not communication through mind" (Mead 1934, p. 50).

Mind is not a given, as for Descartes or Leibniz. It also does not develop according to a logical or epistemological schema as for Piaget. Instead, mind is the temporary result of social communication. Only in this way can mind be democratized, removed from all elite theories that

understand the "mind" as an insulated Platonic space where ideas are passed down or revealed, which presumes that there is an ultimate "authority."

The influence of Wilhelm Wundt, under whom Mead had studied briefly, is most readily apparent in Mead's treatment of the notion of the gesture (ibid., p. 42ff.).<sup>45</sup> In Mead's theory, the gesture, which Wundt defined as a symbol, becomes a "significant symbol" (ibid., p. 47). Gestures are stimulations for the conduct of other individuals and give rise to communication, for they are irresistible stimuli to which everyone must react. Gestures demand response and learning (ibid.).<sup>46</sup> Mead calls this mode of learning *internalization* which is not to be understood in a psychoanalytic way:

"The internalization in our experience of the external conversations of gestures which we carry on with other individuals in the social process is the essence of thinking; and the gestures thus internalized are significant symbols because they have the same meanings for all individual members of the given society or social group, i.e., they respectively arouse the same attitudes in the individuals making them that they arouse in the individuals responding to them: otherwise the individual could not internalize them or be conscious of them and their meanings" (ibid.).

Mead refers to Gabriel de Tarde's laws of imitation (ibid., p. 53), which assumed on the part of the person merely a tendency to do what other persons do. Interaction thus is the continuous attuning of actors. Also from the perspective of education, "sociality" for Mead is essentially *cooperation*; behavior is controlled through social connection and imitation, but not through simply imitating persons or role models or through lasting internalization. Internalization is itself a process, not merely duration. The theory refers to the winks and gestures (ibid., p. 53) that stimulate the conduct of others.

The cry of a child, in Mead's example (ibid., p. 54) calls out the response of the care of the mother; the one is fear and the other protection, or solicitude. The response is not in any sense identical with the other act, and neither is determined by the physiology of the cry alone. The

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<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm Wundt: *Völkerpsychologie*, Band 1: Die Sprache, Erster Teil. Leipzig: Kröner-Engelmann 1900. This is Volume 1 of ten volumes that appeared between 1900 and 1910.

<sup>46</sup> "Gestures become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed; and in all conversations of gestures within the social process, whether external (between different individuals) or internal (between a given individual and himself), the individual's consciousness of the content and the flow of meaning involved depends on his taking the attitude of the other toward his own gestures" (Mead 1934, p. 47).

”cry” is always at the same time a *symbol*; without this additional symbolic content, the mother’s response of care would be a conditioned reflex. With the symbol ”care,” what occurs is cooperative behavior (ibid., p. 55). The mother has to take on the attitude of the child in order to be able to react to the individual ”child.” The child, on the other side, must learn to take on the attitude of the particular significant other in order to be able to detach itself from itself, get outside itself.

In a second stage, the behaviors of *others* are generalized (ibid., p. 158). Education is the process by which the self reaches its full development by organizing these individual attitudes of others into organized, or generalized, social or group attitudes and learning from them, dependent upon social interaction. The child learns neither alone nor ”more” nor ”less” than the adult; its development is instead functional (ibid., p. 288) for purposes of adaptation to society:

”In so far as the child does take the attitude of the other and allows that attitude of the other to determine the thing he is going to do with references to a common end, he is becoming an organic member of society” (ibid., p.159).

”Organic” should not be misunderstood. What is meant is not a kind of fitting into a community that passively allows it; it is instead a process of ”effective adjustment” (ibid., p. 368), without which the child could not develop. Through learning to react to others, the child also learns at the same time to react to the self, in a continuous differentiation of its abilities (ibid., p.137). ”The child has become, through his own impulses, a parent to himself” (ibid., p. 369).

Our ”modern education”, says Mead, does not by coincidence emphasize the central role of the game, or (ibid., pp. 159/160), which is social interaction. The game is at the same time the model of social learning, an illustration of the situation out of which an organized personality arises:

”What goes on in the game goes on in the life of the child all the time. He is continually taking the attitudes of those about him, especially the rôles of those who in some senses control him and on whom he depends. He gets the function of the process in an abstract sort of a way at first. It goes over from the play into the game in real sense. He has to play the game. The morale of the game takes hold of the child more than the larger morale of the whole community. The child passes into the game and the game expresses a social situation in which he can completely enter; its morale may have a greater hold on him than that of the family to which he belongs or the community in which he lives” (ibid., p. 160).

The notion of ”games” is not specified; Mead explains the logic of the game not according

to the cultural difference in children's games, but rather from the perspective of their socializing effect. Because of this, Mead can reach a general and abstract definition of "education":

"Education is definitely *the process of taking over* a certain organized set of responses to one's own stimulation; and until one can respond to himself as the community responds to him, he does not genuinely belong to community" (ibid., S. 265; italics added here).

The child must be able to adjust to the group to which it belongs as it is being brought up; its "self" responds without pause to the social responses the community offers and with which the child handles in the sense of inquiry (ibid.). In other words, the self arises through "co-operative activity" (ibid., p. 317): "it is made possible through the identical reaction of the self and the others" (ibid.).

At the same time, it is important to clarify the addressee in the process of education, which is not the "child" but which Mead calls the "me" or "I". For Mead the self does not consist simply in the bare organization of social attitudes; there is an "I" which is aware of the social "me" (ibid., p. 177). The self takes over sociality; the "I" in this relation of the "I" and the "me" is something that, so to speak, responds to a social situation that is within the experience of the individual. Now, the attitudes the individual is taking toward others are present in his own experience, but his response to them will contain a novel element. The "I" gives the sense of freedom, of initiative (ibid., p. 177). No longer do we see children as "little adults" (ibid., p. 318), because (and to the extent that) adults can enter into the experience of the child - take on their role. This is valid ubiquitously, meaning independently of culture or mentality. "Modern education" is thus a fundamentally new and a historically unique mode of interaction and relating. It bases upon the fact that children and adults are distinguished from each other, which necessitates cooperation:

"Such a distinction ... does lie between the infant and the human society in which he enters. He cannot have the whole self-consciousness of the adult; and the adult finds it difficult, to say the least, to put himself into the attitude of the child. That is not, however, an impossible thing, *and our development of modern education rests on this possibility of the adult finding a common basis between himself and the child*" (ibid., p. 317; italics are added).

A workable relationship emerges through a social process - it is not part of nature. It does not arise out of maternal love or out of paternal duty, but rather is formed through social coordi-

nation or cooperation, whereby the child must be a participant having increasing equality. As a consequence of this theory of education, democracy would lie at the basis of the process. It cannot be viewed merely as one "goal" among others. The pedagogical relationship is negotiated and realigned continuously. It is not characterized by a structural difference in which the authority, slowly and unforeseeably to the child, makes itself superfluous.<sup>47</sup>

Again, the child does not "internalize" authorities, but instead learns to interact with the personalities in his social environment. It is in this way that both the social field and the social self structure themselves, if we assume that for small children, other persons only gradually take on distinctness:

"As social objects, the others with whom the child plays are uncertain in their outlines and shadowy in their structure. What is clear and definite in the child's attitude is the *reaction* in either rôle, that of the self or the other. The child's earliest life is that of social activities, including this reflexive stimulation and response, in a field, in which neither social nor merely physical objects have arisen with definiteness" (ibid., p. 376).

The social self is thus not the recipient of education in the sense of a thing that confronts the child from the outside. It is much more a process of the child utilizing the quality of social experience in order to form the self. With regard to experience, and the experience of children in particular, the following holds: "The Self exists only in relationship with other selves and cannot be reached except through other selves" (Mead 1982, p. 155). We can experience with others only if our selves can not only enter into the experience, but also learn and develop from it. Others must necessarily be a part of children's learning field, for the self cannot relate to itself directly (ibid.). That would mean that we would have to ascribe to the child a primary recognition of its "self," an inner core of identity that exists prior to any experience (ibid., 156).

That very assumption, says Mead, is the general predicate to many education theories, which are so structured that they require a solid addressee that can express itself without yet having the structure of self. However, this would mean that children would have to be able to understand experience from the inside and independently of the social context – which is an assumption that must be rejected.

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<sup>47</sup> This was discussed in German philosophy of education, most intensely and influentially by Herman Nohl in his famous theory of "educational relationship" (Oelkers 2005a).



”The self cannot arise in experience except as there are others there. The other is essential to the appearance of the self. We do not approach the organism from within. There are pains and pleasures within the organism, but the child does not delimit its organism from inside its own skin. The actual process begins at the periphery and goes to the center. The child experiences sound, etc. before it has the experience of its own body; there is nothing in the child that arises as his own experience and then is referred to the outside thing. There are hurt fingers, but they are not referred to the self until the child enters into relationship with others” (ibid., p. 156).

Mead’s metaphor for education, a ”meeting of minds” (Mead 1938, p. 52), is thus aptly chosen. Education consists in processes of continuous adjustment and intellectual cooperation under the condition that we reject the idea of ”a one to one correspondence” (ibid.). In education, as in social life altogether, the correspondence theory of truth is not valid, because it would exclude the fact that *new* elements can determine the interaction. But it is from this very fact that the theory must start out. Education, too, and particularly, must work out ”problematic situations,” and do this permanently.

”In any education that is worthy of the name, what is acquired does go toward the solution of the problems that that we all carry with us, and is the subject of reflection, and leads to the fashioning of new hypotheses and appearance of new objects; but this takes place after the communication which is the mutual indication of objects and characters by the use of gestures which are common symbols, that is, symbols with identical references” (ibid.).

This holds at any age and for all forms of human behavior. Even the most absurd (from the adult’s point of view) constructions of small children are attempts at intelligent problem solving (ibid., pp. 90/91). Children want to explain things, test ideas and hypotheses ”by its fitting into their experience so that it can become a part of this world” (ibid., p. 91). In this way children re-search their world, and they must learn to improve their methods (ibid.). The small child learns to maintain balance, control himself and his environment ”in getting the proper adjustment for his own ultimate response” (ibid., p. 109). This ”mapping of environment” (ibid., p. 134) would not be possible without the understanding cooperation of adults, who share the same realm of experience. Education can thus be seen as democratic cooperation that excludes ”opposition” (ibid., p. 656) between children and adults, because opposition would rob it of its basis.

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