

The Self & Political Possibilities in Dewey & Foucault

Comparative Implications for School & Society

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Abstract

This article explores John Dewey's and Michel Foucault's respective positions on the development of the self and its implications for school and society. Both reject the Cartesian self—in the sense of an individual isolated from body and environment. Rather, both conceive of the individual as a product of the social world. However, their disparate accounts of the process by which the self, or subject, is formed through social relations lead to distinct conceptions of agency and possibilities for political action. While Dewey offers a more holistic account of individual growth through social relations, each philosopher offers unique insights that are useful for both conceptualizing social action as well as classroom applications, particularly for teachers who want to cultivate students as change agents.

Introduction

John Dewey and Michel Foucault are two of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Foucault's impact was almost immediate upon his introduction to academic circles in the United States. His fluid, circulatory account of power has been applied in many domains including education, allowing fresh perspectives on both the identities and functions of teachers and students, while illuminating the complexities of power relations in both schools and the broader culture. His pessimistic tone and close attention to critique and resistance, along with his intensive focus on the subject, make

his analyses timely in the fractured and individualized environments of the 21st century.

Dewey's work has also received renewed attention over the last generation in a number of fields including philosophy, political theory, communications, and education. His work on the contributions of education and community in the formation of democratic life offers a valuable lens into some of the most pressing contemporary social problems.

This study will offer a comparative examination of the emergence of the self and its connections to social and political processes in each of these philosophers. Their respective positions on the formation of the self in relation to the social world will be examined and the sociopolitical possibilities for individuals and groups in each conception will be explored, with a goal toward judging the potential of these theories to inform classroom practice. Professional educators who venture beyond the bachelor's degree level are likely to encounter ideas from these two philosophers, either through direct engagement with their writings or secondarily through other authors. Consequently, teachers should consider how to situate each thinker in their conception of individual growth and how this relates to both their teaching philosophy and classroom practices.

For purposes of brevity and space, larger questions about differences in epistemology and ontology that are not immediately pertinent to the matter at hand will be avoided. The study will begin by examining each of their perspectives on the self, followed by a direct comparison. Next, their positions on the possibilities for individual and social action will be explicated, followed by a comparative analysis and an evaluation of potential consequences for both school and society. The conclusion will argue that each philosopher offers unique insights that are useful as lenses for teachers who want to cultivate students as change agents.

Literature Review

Richard Rorty (1982) offers an initial comparison of these two philosophers with his famous quip that Dewey was "waiting at the end of the road" for Foucault (xviii). He identifies symmetry between Dewey and Foucault on critiques of traditional philosophy, including criticisms of rationality and objectivity (p. 204). Rorty argues that their main difference is one of "moral outlook" (p. 205), in which Dewey offers the possibility of greater hope for human betterment. Others have argued that the differences between Dewey and Foucault run deeper and include distinct understandings of the subject, methodology, and the validity and usefulness of the social sciences (see Colapietro, 2011; Marshall, 1995). Several scholars have noted that both Foucault and Dewey offer fairly

comparable forms of inquiry, which Foucault calls *problematization* (see Coopman, 2011a, 2011b; Rabinow, 2011, 2013; Reynolds, 2004; Stone, 2012), though some argue that only Dewey gives direction toward building new possibilities (see Gayman, 2011; Stone, 2012), which complements Rorty's perspective.

Regarding comparative conceptions of self, Prado's (2010) work identifies substantial similarities between Dewey and Foucault with respect to the formation of subjects, in which both provide an embodied account that emphasizes lived experiences and the acquisition of attitudes (p. 189). Garrison (1998) concurs, but prefers Dewey's account of social self-creation over Foucault's self-created subject based upon what he labels "selfish-creation" (p. 111). The present work expands on the above accounts, focusing upon the formation of the individual in relation to social circumstances, possibilities of political action, and consequences of appropriating each conception for teachers in K-12 classrooms. While Garrison correctly identifies disparate relations between the self and social in Dewey and Foucault, he underplays what Foucault offers in his conceptualization of practices of freedom based upon care of the self. Foucault's care of the self, it will be argued, augments similar points made by Dewey, while highlighting distinct democratic possibilities that are often underdeveloped in Dewey's accounts. Although Dewey provides a model of individual growth that is more easily appropriated by educational professionals in classroom contexts, Foucault's model of self-development provides important correctives to some dimensions of oppression that Dewey ignores, making both conceptions useful for classroom teachers.

Formation of the Self

Dewey's Habitual Self

Dewey grounds the formation of the self in a naturalistic metaphysics, which posits individuals as biologically rooted, and in continuous transactions with their lived environments. He rejects the transcendental self, seeing humans as inherently social and deriving their sense of individuality from environmental engagement. Dewey (1964) states, "through the influence of the social environment each person becomes saturated with the customs, the beliefs, purposes, skills, hopes and fears of the cultural group to which he belongs" (p. 10). Individuals learn about the world through these transactions, which modify their impulses and help form what Dewey calls *habits*. Dewey (1922) defines *habit* as "that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired...and which is operative in some subdued subordinate

form even when not obviously dominating activity (p. 40).” In Dewey’s conception, habits are active adaptations to stimuli, which foster behavioral dispositions and tendencies toward action. They are acquired through prior activity, and are in many ways synonymous with, though not reducible to, will. Habits form the foundation on which all bodily and mental functions are built and thus constitute the self. This conception breaks down mind body dualisms, as habits are simultaneously bodily and intellectual as well as moral in nature. Dewey (1922) states,

our purposes and commands regarding action (whether physical or moral) come to us through the refracting medium of bodily and moral habits (p. 32).” In this formulation, moral judgment resides in habits that have been acquired through lived experience while adapting to environmental conditions. (Johnson, 2014)

While Dewey (1922) emphasizes the formative nature of social forces on human conduct, he also identifies how individuals differentiate themselves. The beginning of individuality, according to Dewey, emerges through what he calls *impulses*. Impulses are natural reactions to stimuli, but take shape through interactions in particular contexts, working to modify existing habits or form new ones. Individuals must continually adjust their habits as situations change, so as people have unique experiences, they differentiate themselves from others, develop broader, more robust habits, and become distinct individuals.

In Dewey’s conception, transactions between an individual and their environment are not a one-way imposition upon the individual, as the individual is also able to alter social conditions. As individuals mature, continued experiences offer them increased control over their environments. The extent of an individual’s control, however, depends upon attaining robust habits of inquiry and reflection, which in turn, requires opportunities for transactions within a vibrant community that fosters them.

Dewey’s self is an inherently active agent due to its biological makeup, though the specific tenor and frequency of such active tendencies can be cultivated or blunted depending on social and environmental dynamics. This implores schools and educators to channel the creative energy of students in positive ways that foster their curiosity, imagination, and social engagement with others. From this perspective, the extent that one is encouraged to explore, observe and reflect carefully about situations, confer with others, ask questions, and refine their own understandings will in no small part determine an individual’s character and disposition, making the classroom environment a key site for the rearing of selves.

Foucault's Discursive Subject

Foucault, unlike Dewey, does not provide metaphysical grounding for the self. Instead, Foucault argues that what is labeled the self is discursively constructed through relations of power. Foucault investigates two processes that, taken together, form what is commonly called the self. The first he labels *technologies of domination*, and the second he identifies as *technologies of the self*. Foucault's (1994) subject emerges out of these discursive formations, or "games of truth," (p. 15) that are formed by power/knowledge relations. The first category, technologies of domination, focuses explicitly on the way subjects are produced through procedures of categorization, normalization, and examination that work to distinguish subjects from one another and help individual subjects identify themselves.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) explains that disciplinary power (an analog to technologies of domination) first emerged concurrent with the bureaucracies yielded by the Industrial Revolution. According to Foucault, the Fordist and Taylorist models of factory production, which divide the skills of labor into minute tasks for greater workforce efficiency, also work to produce subjects with particular characteristics. What Foucault (1977) calls "docile bodies" are produced, in part, when:

the act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, articulation is defined; to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power. (p. 152)

In Foucault's conception, discipline involves carefully categorizing each worker by job, skill level, and rank – this individualizes by locating each person within a network of power relations relative to the factory. The processes of categorization, combined with micro-discipline, affect how the self is experienced and continually shapes the power relations of factory life.

Similar regimes have made their way into schools. Through techniques such as surveillance, examinations and grading, students are both implicitly and explicitly ranked for behavior, intelligence, and other factors. Foucault (1977) refers to these as processes as *differentiation and normalization*. The practices of being a student work to form students' subjectivities as they are categorized and compared to "the norm" according to test performance, behavior, as well as other distinctions along such lines as gender and race. As subjects experience these techniques of normalization and differentiation, they internalize the distinctions and, hence, subjects are produced.

In technologies of the self, Foucault begins to explore the agency

of subjects within power relations (see Colapietro, 2011; Olssen, 1999, 2007; Reynolds, 2004; Skinner, 2012; Iftode, 2013). Though subjects are formed through power/knowledge relations, such formations are never complete. Foucault (1994) argues that power relations presuppose agency on the part of the subject, as without some relation of power it would instead be a relation of pure domination and thus no power would need to be exercised. In addition, power relations are always in flux, and are “not given once and for all” (p. 12). While power relations are never totalizing, they do frame the possibilities through which one can act. In other words, one can liberate oneself from a particular discourse, but not from discourse itself (Wisnewski, 2000). Agency in this conception is enacted through appropriating discourses in novel ways.

Foucault identifies sex as an important cultural locus of power/knowledge relations that extends into many other domains, including conceptions of the self. According to Foucault, the dominant discursive formation regarding sex in Western culture views talking about sex and sexual promiscuity as liberating. Foucault challenges this understanding, which he pinpoints as originating with Freud’s “repressive hypothesis.” The repressive hypothesis suggests that Westerners repress their “natural” sexual impulses in order to adequately function in society. Instead, Foucault (1978) examines the matter discursively, stating “The question I would like to pose is not, why are we repressed? But rather, Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed?” (pp. 8-9). Foucault believes the repressive hypothesis allows Westerners to conceive of sex discourse as subversive, affording a feeling of liberation, while reinforcing dominant power/knowledge relations that regulate sexual discourse. An important part of this discourse, asserts Foucault, is the inducement to speak about sex at every turn, which allows speakers to form their own subjectivity. Foucault (1978) argues “It is the agency of sex that we must break away from...The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures (p. 157).” Foucault argues that what must be done, instead, is to critique the dominant discourse of sexuality and find ways of being and acting that resist and subvert it. Foucault’s suggestion of “bodies and pleasures” is an early indication of his move toward the care of the self, in which individuals recognize one another’s needs as well as their own, but do not confuse such recognition with liberation. In this conception, criticizing the dominant discursive construction in both sexual and other domains opens up possibilities for resistance, which can lead to new practices of freedom for individuals.

Comparing Self Conceptions

Dewey's conception of the self formed through habits is a social self that is relatively fluid. This self is continually changing, but not easily malleable, and can only be changed by modifying existing habits. This is a largely linear conception of the self with a past that is in continuity with its present, as an individual achieves character growth not by destroying past habits but transforming them into something useful for present action. Dewey's self is continuously growing as it is constantly being shaped and reshaped through transactional relations, though the particulars of such growth are predicated on the details of an individual's experiences within social environments.

Both philosophers posit a self that is formed through social practices, though Foucault's self is less anchored than Dewey's. Because "there is no human being unless described in some way and hence constituted as a subject," (Marshall, 1995, p. 318) Foucault's discursive subject has the potential to produce varying selves, even multiple and contradictory selves. Dewey recognizes that individuals sometimes act in contradictory ways, though for Dewey, the self tends toward stability over time as increased experience and understanding offer the individual greater control. For Foucault, there is no presumed linear process of growth or increased control over situations for the self. One may acquire new understandings and knowledge, but Foucault would be suspicious of Dewey's claim that this necessarily offers greater control over environments given time, experience, and reflection. While Dewey readily acknowledges the possibility of arrested individual growth, Foucault's more pessimistic stance would not privilege linear growth even as a normative model.

Foucault's decentered, discursive subject helps to explain important differences between the two accounts. Whereas Dewey's naturalistic approach historicizes the individual's experience within the organism/environment transaction, Foucault instead historicizes the discourse that produces the subject. The individual's experience becomes important only to the extent that they utilize or are subjected to available discourses. In Foucault's account, it is unclear how personal growth is achieved, but this is not a specific aim of the Foucaultian perspective, which instead looks to problematize privileged discursive formations, of which Dewey's linear growth model could be considered an example.

Social and Political Possibilities

Dewey's Habituated Agent

For Dewey, the self is inextricably connected to its environment.

Thus, the same community habits that help form the self will also largely frame the possibilities for social and political engagement within the larger society. One of Dewey's primary concerns with habits is that, even though they inevitably change, this often occurs haphazardly. One may come upon a new course of action by blindly following impulse or through a process of trial and error. Adjusting habits also creates discomfort, leading to resistance on the part of some individuals, who may stubbornly hold onto old habits. Dewey locates an opportunity for cultivating more adaptive habits through thick interactions in a diversity of environments. The resulting habits would make individuals more flexible, refine their degree of perception and reflection, and subsequently increase their ability to connect local, personal experience to macro-level social conditions.

In *Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927/1946) identifies the importance of local participation in the reconstruction of a democratic culture, in which individual habits are crafted and refined through exercising one's role as community member and citizen. Against Walter Lippmann's conclusions that most individuals were not competent enough to understand the complex dynamics of modern life (see Lippmann, 1922/2010, 1925/1993), Dewey believes active experience in one's community could provide the necessary educative experience for competence to emerge. It also provides the basis for individual growth, leading to the formation of more independent individuals. In what Dewey (1930/1999) calls *new individualism*, the local community would be both the companion and corollary to the school, fostering opportunities for individuals to grow through continuous communication and participation in social inquiry.

In both classrooms and communities, intersubjective communication both within and between groups opens up possibilities for rich learning experiences in which members articulate their own impressions, receive feedback from others, and modify their positions. As Dewey (1924/1958) states, "when communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation, whether it be public discourse or that preliminary discourse termed thinking. Events turn into objects, things with a meaning" (p. 166). In this process of intellectual experimentation, connections are made that not only enrich understanding of the immediate matter, but imbue a broad range of topics with added meanings by virtue of the connections made through the communicative process. In this way, communication enriches experience, connecting with participants' impulses and honing their habits toward more effective social action, while preparing them for even more fruitful social exchanges in the future.

The give and take speaking and listening produces meaning, but in Dewey's conception, meaning is not derived solely from the exchange

of information. Although information exchange is important, a more crucial point of communication is that meaning is formed within the constructive process, the activity itself. Dewey (1924/1958) explains:

Meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects. But the behavior of which it is a quality is a distinctive behavior; cooperative, in that response to another's act involves contemporaneous response to a thing as entering into the other's behavior, and this upon both sides. (p. 179)

Dewey describes an intersubjective communication process that is based upon anticipating the response of the other. As transactions continue, meanings get co-constructed and reconstructed within the process. Meaning is created within this process, yet this dynamic also affects individual growth. Garrison (1998) explains that "through communication, we and our world is transubstantiated" in a process he calls "social self-creation" (p. 130). In Foucault, we see a focus upon how such constructions form subjectivity through power relations. With Dewey, subjectivity is part of a transactional construction of experience in which meaning is mutually achieved by active agents in a communal process.

What emerges from transactions, in which flexible habits and careful reflective thinking has been cultivated, are intelligent individuals, able to exert greater control over their environment. To Dewey, intelligence is embodied in the form of more intelligent, flexible habits that the individual exercises by deeper and more nuanced responses to stimuli. These flexible, intelligent habits open up a field of agency in which individuals feel empowered to affect their environment in positive ways. Dewey (1924/1958), in reference to the embodied mind, states:

It either surrenders, conforms, and for the sake of peace becomes a parasitical subordinate, indulges in egotistical solitude; or its activities set out to remake conditions in accord with desire. In the latter process, intelligence is born – not mind which appropriates and enjoys the whole of which it is a part, but mind as individualized, initiating, adventuring, experimenting, dissolving. Its possessed powers, its accomplished unions with the world, are now reduced to uncertain agencies to be forged into efficient instrumentalities in the stress and strain of trial. (p. 245)

Like intelligent action, individuality is, for Dewey, an achievement. But this is not the achievement of an atomized individual, but that of a community that has practiced the communal habits of inquiry and reflection, and thereby imparted such habits to individuals that are reared in such environments. Here, there is a mutually supportive relationship between the individual and the social environments around them. Those individuals affect the environment in turn, and as

they grow in experience, their affect becomes more pronounced, while simultaneously affecting and being affected by others within processes of communication and inquiry.

Foucault's Experimental Agent

In Foucault's genealogical work on sexuality he uncovers a shift in self conceptions between antiquity and the present. Greek and Roman cultures, Foucault explains, emphasized caring for oneself, which involved a set of practices—uniquely appropriated by each individual—regarding everyday matters such as diet, sex, medicine, and general health. Foucault pinpoints a crucial distinction between the ethic of care of the self and later Christian conceptions that advocate a renunciation of self, along with more rigid prescriptions for behaviors codified by the church. Foucault (1984a) utilizes the care of the self to emphasize individual agency, arguing that within power relations individuals have choices of how to conduct themselves, including ways of resistance that can “transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior” (p. 27). This speaks to ways of conducting affairs with a minimum of domination, as it posits the locus of behavior within a self-discipline that allows one to modify the self through practices such as “self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself” (Foucault, 1984a, p. 29). Foucault does not offer precise prescriptions, but instead provides examples from Greek and other ancient cultures that exemplified this ethic in ways that can be drawn upon and reworked in framing relations of the self and others.

Foucault references the Stoics, who exercised care of the self through practices of obedience and memorization of rules, but also through letters to friends, disclosure of oneself, and reflective examination of one's conscience (Foucault, 1988, p. 34). This conception is one of personal experimentation, which includes “the testing on oneself, of one's mode of being and thought” (Davidson, 2005, p. xxvii) with the intention of modifying one's thinking, and freeing oneself from given discourses by fostering more inner-directed practices.

Although Foucault's (1984b) emphasis is on the self, he also illuminates the social nature of these practices, stating:

It also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. (p. 45)

The care of the self structures relations with others, most notably friends and family (see Coles, 1992; Iftode, 2013; Olssen, 1999; Smeyers & Waghid, 2010; Wisnewski, 2000). The practices associated with care of the self set up the conditions for freedom, according to Foucault, by making one subject to one's own moral code, rather than the code of dominant power relations. These practices, however, are not invented by individuals. Rather, "they are platforms that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (Foucault, 1994, p. 11), and are suggested as models for creative appropriation by individuals in the present as ways to construct new social formations and ways of relating to one another.

Foucault (1984b) says care of the self is "the expression of a principle that is singular in its manifestation within each person, but universal by the form it assumes in everyone, and collective by the community bond it establishes between individuals" (p. 93). According to Foucault, such a position is necessary to set up the proper conditions for political action. But to what political end this position would promote is not clear outside of escaping dominant discursive formations. Some interpretations of the political possibilities of care of the self include forming "alliances of involuntary servitude" (Thompson, 2003, p. 131). In this conception, one would locate like-minded others and come together in communities of interest for focused social or political action. Racevskis' (1994) account supports this position, arguing that care of the self requires a pessimistic form of activism, in which one would not anticipate social solutions or political victories, but only maintain constant resistance to dominant power relations. Olssen (2007) argues that Foucaultian principles could form the basis of a "thin community" that is "borderless" and "complexly differentiated" (p. 209). Despite the social orientation of Foucault's care of the self, each of these accounts identifies social action as primarily based on the personal interest of like-minded individuals. From these perspectives, communities would consist of aggregations of otherwise disconnected individuals that come together for specific purposes, without any necessary ties beyond the purely instrumental. These possibilities align with contemporary social movements that are bolstered by digital connectivity.

Foucault's (1994) social and political possibilities are illuminated by his critique of transparent communication:

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power... The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination. (p. 18)

In this passage, Foucault's criticizes Habermas' conception of ideal speech conditions. Because transparent communication is impossible for Foucault, his emphasis becomes minimizing the harmful effects of power within communication, which begins with the practice of individuals. Consistent with his focus on power from the bottom-up, Foucault's focus on care of the self must move through particular individuals in local circumstances. As Foucault is wary of institutions, he would likely be suspicious of any mass movement of liberation, though his project does not preclude amelioration in particular circumstances for specific issues. If larger movements toward freedom were to occur through these principles, they would have to coalesce through the initially separate practices of individuals and small groups, and extend over time into larger formations.

Comparative Analysis

Implications for Society

Dewey clearly offers a more optimistic account of political possibilities than Foucault. Where Foucault envisions movements beginning with individual practices, Dewey identifies communities as the necessary focus of intervention toward amelioration, as communities form the habits upon which individuals act. These individuals, in turn, grow in their ability to influence their communities through experience and cultivation of habits. Thus, Dewey offers a more holistic conception of how individuals relate to society that does not require a precise starting point for social action or the building of social movements.

These distinctions connect to disparate conceptions of freedom between Dewey and Foucault. Where Dewey believes freedom can best be achieved through cooperation, Foucault believes freedom is to be found largely through resistance, which in Foucault's conception, resides first and foremost within each individual. This speaks to Foucault's suspicion toward institutions, which is in sharp distinction from Dewey, who believes that individual growth is partially predicated on the strength and vitality of institutions such as schools.

The care of the self is both a positive freedom and a social freedom, but from a Deweyan perspective, it under-conceptualizes how individuals could construct practices that would allow them to care for themselves. For Dewey, one's individuality is connected to the quality of their experiences, which in turn ties them directly to their community. In this conception, any project of freedom must first point its lens toward the community, rather than the self. On this topic, Dewey (1930/1999) states "the attempt to cultivate it first in an individual and then extend it to

form an organically unified society is fantasy” (p. 32). Although Foucault would never wish to form a unified society, this passage illustrates that, from Dewey’s perspective, a project of freedom that begins with the individual is not based upon an adequate conceptual foundation. While ethics must ultimately reside within individual judgment in Dewey’s account, the individual is not considered the sole locus of such judgment, nor can individual ethics be understood in extraction from the larger community, as “one’s relations with others remain partially constitutive of the inner self” (Garrison, 1998, p. 127). A Foucaultian position would not necessarily dispute this point, but would emphasize the need to, at least periodically, transgress against the dominant discourses of the community. Practices related to the care of the self could conceivably prepare an individual for such transgressions when necessary.

Foucault arguably sets up a “false self/society dualism” (Garrison, 1998, p. 119). The need to find space outside of power relations in Foucault’s account tends to pit individuals against society. Conceiving of relations between individuals and society in adversarial terms may make individuals less likely to contribute to society in positive ways. Instead, they would be more likely fight it, or attempt to create something outside of it. While this may sometimes yield positive contributions, it is not likely to encourage democratic engagement outside of one-sided partisan participation. Thus, it aligns well with contemporary political dynamics, though in the political realm such a stance would be unlikely to foster a more deliberative vision of democratic politics, which is an explicit goal of Deweyan democratic scholars.

The political possibilities of Foucault’s account are necessarily constrained by his pervasive conception of power. By conceiving of power as ubiquitous within social relations, his possibilities for social freedom are restricted, as the individual must care for himself and those around him, while being ever-careful of exercising power in a way that might be dominating. Framing relations in this manner leads to a timid approach to social affairs and a minimalist ethic in the public arena. Because transparent communication is impossible for Foucault, he affords it little possibility of being able to overcome differences. While Dewey also rejects any notion of perfect communication, his conception of transaction, or communication as an activity in which meaning is co-constructed, allows him to identify communication as a process that holds the possibility of transcending differences and allowing disparate groups to proceed toward common goals. Thus, Dewey, unlike Foucault, conceptualizes communities as allies in achieving greater freedom for individuals.

A Foucaultian response would likely view Dewey’s conception of self and community as overly optimistic, while under-conceptualizing power

relations that could possibly lead to more severe conditions of domination. Although Dewey is not guilty of a quest for certainty in the world of communication, he may overestimate the possibilities of communication to overcome entrenched differences. One can appreciate Dewey's insights into habits and inquiry, while still viewing his larger project for social democracy as naive and, from a Foucaultian perspective, also dangerous, as it could potentially valorize oppressive discourses that should instead be problematized and transgressed.

Foucault was wary of articulating any specific version of social change because he was suspicious of any perspective that claimed privileged knowledge. This would be a danger of any social inquiry for Foucault, even an open-ended, inclusive, and fallible one. Dewey's account of the method of intelligence through science is an attempt to recover scientific thinking from some of the dangers of which Foucault later warns, but Foucault considers this an impossible task. Prado (2010) sums up the point succinctly by saying "for Dewey, human activity can make things *better*...for Foucault, the consequences of human activity only make things *different*" (p. 179; emphasis in original). For Dewey, freedom equals greater control over an increasing multitude of environments, but Foucault would likely identify this goal as foolhardy, illusory, and ultimately, dangerous in its assumptions.

Consequences for Education

Dewey's theories of experiential and deliberative learning have been thoroughly utilized in education discourse, though it is worth briefly articulating what his conception of the self offers schooling. Dewey's self formed through community transactions places a renewed emphasis on the importance of place-based learning, service-learning, and other educational endeavors that use of the school as a locus of community events. This is particularly important in the increasingly individualized social environments of the 21st century. The connections between schools and their local communities have weakened over the last few decades. A Deweyan approach suggests that school-community ties are vital to the formation of strong and secure individuals who have their experiences anchored in a thick network of local relations. Such an approach requires a greater emphasis on cooperative learning beyond the execution of utilitarian tasks into having students consider real problems from their community, as well as contentious issues in the broader culture. These experiences would foster the conditions for individual growth by affording students broad experiences and different perspectives that would disrupt their taken-for-granted understandings and compel them

to empathize with diverse others. Such an approach arguably deserves renewed attention in light of contemporary concerns about political and ideological polarization.

In the classroom, Foucault's analysis of power relations can be useful tool for uncovering and critiquing practices of domination, shining a light on domineering teaching practices, and helping teachers find more balanced approaches within the classroom. Foucauldian analyses are useful in calling attention to the unfair treatment of marginalized groups in schools based upon social categories such as gender (see Boldt, 2002), race, (see Ferguson, 2001), and sexual orientation (see Rasmussen, 2006). These social concerns are not always adequately addressed in Dewey's accounts and Foucault's perspective provides important correctives in this regard. Foucault's suspicion of institutions can also act as conceptual ballast against Dewey's optimism, steeling teachers against the inevitable classroom interactions that may not measure up to the generally benign conception that characterizes Dewey's theory of transactional communication. Foucault's perspective may also help teachers make sense of students' character and development changes that do not conform to the linear growth model posited by Dewey. While Dewey offers a useful normative model for individual growth, Foucault prepares readers for circumstances that may fall short of these expectations.

Foucault also challenges teachers to reflect upon the dominant discourses that underpin their own practices, and to consider those that may be marginalized in any situation. Foucault's care of the self suggests that an individualized approach to learning may be useful, particularly with struggling students. In such instances, teachers may find themselves serving as both counselor and role model as they model individual practices for students that may help them succeed. Cooperative classroom environments that may ostensibly appear to be working well may feature hidden oppressions that could be overlooked, and Foucault's perspective can help teachers to be more reflective about otherwise taken-for-granted classroom practices.

Conclusion

Foucault's more pessimistic assessment of social action mirrors that of our time. Foucault intended his ethic of care of the self to be an antidote to the individualization of contemporary life. While it may serve individuals well, it would arguably not help to resolve the deep cultural divisiveness that has become a fixture of contemporary American politics. As the foundations of community that provide the basis for strong individuals are eroded in contemporary culture, people are increasingly

left with the superficial, commodified impressions of mass media from which to construct their sense of self and community. Unwittingly, Foucault's ethic, without an understanding of how individuals achieve individuality, may leave followers largely at the mercy of these forces, while allowing the neoliberal myth of atomized individualism to proceed unhindered. It is worth noting that Foucault may have further developed and articulated the social dimensions of his care of the self if not for his untimely demise. Dewey provides an alternative consideration that can be seen as overly-optimistic, but provides more fully articulated connections between individuals and their acquired dispositions in relation to social environments.

Perhaps the most productive response would be to hold these two accounts in creative tension. Foucault's care of the self is a reminder that individual practices matter and that seemingly unsurmountable social forces necessarily leave spaces for dissent and new formations to emerge. Those new possibilities can only form, however, if individuals take responsibility for them. This has direct implications for both teachers and students as the specter of standardized testing continues to haunt American classrooms.

By contrast, Dewey prompts us to consider that, even in dark times, power analysis is not the only way to conceive of social relations and, if overused, may overshadow opportunities for creative dialogue and the creation of shared understandings with those who hold different ideologies. Dewey's position, though arguably optimistic for contemporary times, is a reminder of the power of constructive dialogue to affect positive social change, while Foucault emphasizes that resistance to dominant discourses is necessary whenever dialogue is unachievable or breaks down.

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