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John Dewey's Community of Inquiry

Introduction

At the turn of the previous century, John Dewey stood out as a leader in the field of progressive education. He was, at that time, almost certainly a highly controversial figure, heavily criticized even at that relatively early stage in his career, owing to the fact that those attempting to implement his ideas tended to do so in ways that were superficial and, because of this, largely unsuccessful in practical terms. Dewey himself, however, has been largely misunderstood, mainly on account of the selective and unrigorous approach adopted by so many of his followers, who have tended to focus their attention on just some of his works, while ignoring or failing to understand the others. They often focus, for instance, exclusively on works devoted to pedagogy or the philosophy of education (broadly construed), without paying attention to his thoughts on epistemology and logic, which are in fact essential to any proper understanding of his pedagogical thought, as well as to its practical application. Another reason may, quite probably, be connected with the fact that Dewey lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three, and at the same time was a highly prolific writer. His philosophy evolved over a long span of many years, making it necessary to recognize a division of his oeuvre into three quite distinct periods: early, middle and late.

It would also appear that this problem was by no means confined to Dewey's followers and critics from the mid-20th century: indeed, the issue remains largely unresolved, even now. For example, one frequently comes across progressive ideas in official curricula or other documents aimed at assessing the performance of schools, but they hardly ever exert any influence upon actual educational prac-

tice. What is more, some of the methods purporting to reflect Deweyian precepts have been widely misinterpreted. Another problematic feature is that his theoretical legacy, as regards his philosophy of education, is pretty vast, extending as it does from strictly practical outcomes right through to highly theoretical insights.

Most of all, some critics remain doubtful as to whether Dewey succeeded in his struggle against dualism – or they go further and maintain that he simply failed in his attempts to argue for an anti-dualistic approach. This paper, on the other hand, aims to prove that Dewey succeeded as an anti-dualist. The position defended here is that many of his ideas have yet to be properly understood and applied, so that we ought to take a fresh and closer look at many of these if we wish to achieve a proper understanding of the central notions of his pragmatic philosophy, including his so called instrumentalism, his theory of inquiry enlarged by a theory of experience, his conception of the sense of community, and his anti-dualistic approach towards education.

Dewey's instrumentalism

John Dewey, like all other pragmatists in the late nineteenth century, was influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory. As a result, an interesting kind of pragmatism developed: so called instrumentalism. While Dewey, in his later work, also called this empirical naturalism, naturalistic empiricism, or naturalistic humanism¹, instrumentalism remains the more familiar term for this.

Dewey came to believe that a productive, naturalistic approach to the theory of knowledge must begin with a consideration of the development of knowledge as an adaptive human response to enviroing conditions aimed at an active restructuring of these conditions. Unlike traditional approaches in the theory of knowledge, which saw thought as a subjective primitive out of which knowledge was composed, Dewey's approach understood thought genetically, as the product of the interaction between organism and environment, and knowledge as having practical instrumentality in the guidance and control of that interaction.²

Dewey displays a strongly naturalistic approach towards reality. Reality taken as a whole exhibits, for him, a homogenous nature. Instrumentalism holds that all human knowledge and activities function as instruments that constitute means serving the end of adapting to and controlling the surrounding environment. According to him, nature's aim is to maintain stability and balance between

¹ J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London 1929, p.1a.

² *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/dewey/>>, (access: 15.01.2013).

all of its components. Whenever there are any tensions and disruptions, nature instinctively and automatically tries to overcome them. A human being is a part of its environment, helping to constitute nature itself; as a result, there are constant interactions (or transactions) between human beings and their surroundings. The self and its environment are inseparable. However, nature is only a reality for the self when he or she experiences something. Thus, nature cannot be alien to experience. “Nature and experience is *of* as well as *in* nature. It is not experience which is experienced, but nature: stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience.”³

By nature Dewey understands reality as both a biological and a social environment. Nature changes, renews and grows, so the self also changes and develops. This idea helps Dewey overcome the subject / object dualism, in that the naturalistic approach indicates that interaction always occurs between an organism and its environment and is a reciprocal relationship. A human being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment⁴ Growth within a social environment happens through the transmission of experience and through communication within a community.

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness as the sociologists say.⁵

In this longer passage Dewey neatly captures the continuity of a human being’s existence within his or her social environment. As we shall see later, though, there are still further reasons for stressing the importance of community to education.

The need for a theory of experience in education

The very important notion and key feature of progressive education is actually something very pragmatic: namely, *experience*. This, as was already mentioned,

³ J. Dewey, op. cit., p. 4a.

⁴ J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, A Penn State Electronic Classics Publication, The Pennsylvania State University 2001 (1916), p. 16.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

is inseparable from nature. Dewey repeatedly emphasized in his career as an educator and philosopher that not every experience is educative – some are even miseducative. *Experience and Education* evaluates people's efforts in implementing progressive ideas, along with their frequent failures in regard to this. Mostly, they fail due to their having been more concerned with just establishing the concepts associated with progressivism, and with rejecting traditional schooling, so that they started to think in terms of an *-ism*, rather than concentrating on what is really involved in good education. He claims that "Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness".⁶

It is, however, the teacher's business to distinguish educative experiences from non-educative ones, and to seek to expose his or her pupils to the former rather than the latter. Thus, in order to understand what we stand to gain from Deweyian thought, we must comprehend his theory of experience. Dewey arguably formulated the most important ideas of his philosophy of education in his work "*Democracy and Education. An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*", where he holds that "The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a passive element peculiarly combined".⁷ Thus, an experience involves something that *we do* as well as something that *we undergo*. "An experience is an activity which has consequences that affect us in such a way that we learn something from it".⁸ In *Experience and Education* Dewey gives the example of a child reaching its hand into a flame encouraged by its light, and learning from being burnt that fire can burn him, so that he never does it again. We may learn from our experiences because the active and passive aspects of experience are interdependent and connected. Thanks to that we can come to reflect upon our actions. This is why Dewey emphasizes the notion that "No experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought".⁹

Even so, reflection upon experience is not just a matter of recognizing how a given action and its consequences happen to stand relative to one another: it is also a question of arriving at a fuller understanding of the very nature of that relationship. Dewey compares such meaningful and intelligent thinking with the method of trial and error, where we do something, and if our action fails we sim-

⁶ J. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, The Macmillan Company, New York 1958, p. 13.

⁷ J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, op.cit., p. 133.

⁸ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, Routledge International Studies in the philosophy of education, New York 2013, p. 29.

⁹ J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*, op. cit., p. 139.

ply try something else until we find something that works.¹⁰ Such acting is less controlled, and less valuable, than that which involves a grasp of the relationship between actions and their consequences. It is obvious that such acting, pursued thoughtlessly, is even dangerous, as thoughtless experimentation can sometimes have quite negative consequences. Consequently, it is necessary that cause and effect relations be taught in schools to eliminate redundant forms of experience that are simply a waste of time and do not possess any educative value. Hence, the understanding of action outlined by Dewey is one that encompasses the prediction and expectation that particular actions will follow after others. Thoughtful action, we might say, itself calls out for, or demands, reflection upon itself. In the context of reflective forms of experience, we can interact with our environment in a purposeful and intelligent manner. In fact, the sort of reflection that Dewey describes here resembles inquiry itself: thinking, rather than being disconnected from experience, just is an essential part of the latter – it exists precisely while we are experiencing something. As Jennifer Bleazby observes, Dewey rejects not only the dualism of body and mind, but also that of reason and experience.¹¹

Dewey's Theory of Inquiry

What is absolutely central to Dewey's thought is the idea of the inseparability of inquiry from its social environment. He had realized that he would have to examine the process of reflection itself if he was ever to find a firm basis for the potentially controversial (if not problematic) points that he wished to make – points that helped to mark out a new and original direction, and which he believed were crucial for the development of reflective thinking. He first started to deal with this issue in his work *How We Think*, which was designed mainly with educational issues in mind, continuing it in *Studies in Logical Theory*. However, he only really presented the project of his logic fully and in depth later, in *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry*. What Dewey offers us is, in effect, an operational approach to the problem of inquiry, defining it as “the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations so as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole”.¹² Following the overall pattern of his inquiry, we may observe how he

¹⁰ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 29.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 30.

¹² J. Dewey, *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry*, Henry Holt & Company, New York 1938, p. 104.

overcomes many different kinds of dualism, while within his theory of inquiry itself we can distinguish five distinct operational steps.

Starting with the first step, we may note that Dewey holds that inquiry is initiated when we are exposed to a situation that we find somehow *confusing, conflicting, or indeterminate*. “It is the situation that has these traits. We are doubtful because the situation is inherently doubtful”.¹³ Such situations interrupt our habitual interaction with the world and disrupt our established beliefs. However, when we ourselves happen to be exposed to an indeterminate situation, it does not follow that we will evoke reflective thinking: on the contrary, we might easily opt to ignore it, owing to the intentional and selective nature of perception. In Dewey, things are quite different from how they are in traditional empiricism, since “experience is not random sense stimuli imposing itself upon the sensory organs of a disinterested spectator”.¹⁴ If we were not interested in experiences that, in spite of this have, somehow succeeded in capturing our attention, then we simply would not hear, for instance, a person talking next to us – or even, for that matter, see them. Consequently, it is not only hearing that is selective, but also vision. This important feature of perception has tremendous consequences, both for education and for inquiry itself. Indeed, in order to initiate inquiry, we must first *judge* that the situation in question is problematic for us. So, at the initial stage judgment is crucial. We only get ourselves involved in a process of inquiry because we want to or need to, and register this fact.

Once we have intentionally selected some experience as a subject of inquiry, it must be the case that we regard it as being in some way problematic. The unsettled, indeterminate situation may now be called a *problematic situation*. Nevertheless, even though it is commonly said that a problem well put is a problem half-solved, in concrete practical terms this step does not take us all that far.¹⁵ The process of reflection here is not one that occurs between a subject and an object, but rather between a subject and an unresolved situation that has emerged within the environment. In order to move ahead at this stage of the inquiry, we may wish to set up the problem as having the form of a series of questions: questions that need to be answered if we are to arrive at the results that we are hoping for from our investigation here – what might be called an agenda for our inquiry.¹⁶

¹³ Ibidem, p. 106.

¹⁴ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning: Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁵ J. J. McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey, Volume II. The Lived Experience*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York 1973, p.229.

¹⁶ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 33.

The next stage in an inquiry is that of formulating a *problem-solution*. A problem well stated might indeed be said to be on the way to being solved, but it is also the case that “determining the genuine problem is a *progressive inquiry*”.¹⁷ The first step towards developing a problem-solution, then, is to identify and separate out those constituents capable of possessing a stable, determinate existence, distinguishing these from those that are observable but, for some reason or other, indeterminate. And this, of course, is to be done on the basis of observation. Dewey calls these “the facts of the case”.¹⁸ They suggest possible solutions by determining the actual conditions of the situation. “The possible solution presents itself, therefore, as an *idea*, just as the terms of the problem (which are facts) are instituted by observation. Ideas are anticipated consequences (forecasts) of what will happen when certain operations are executed under and with respect to observed conditions”.¹⁹ Thus, an idea is, first of all, an anticipation of what may happen; it frames certain possibilities and predicts the future consequences of a given case. Ideas, we might say, are conceptual interpretations of how to deal with a problem. Since inquiry is a progressive process of determining solutions to some problem or other, ideas must inevitably differ from each other as a function of the particular stage of interpretation to which they pertain. First, they are vague, and occur as *suggestions*.²⁰ They are, often, a spur to action, but so far lack any logical status. Suggestions become ideas when they are examined and found to be good enough to figure in or serve as a problem-solution. The investigation of an idea is carried out on the basis of our reasoning about its capacity to fulfil its role, but the final test is that of establishing whether it actually functions. Bleazby is surely right to claim that imagination plays an important function in Dewey’s conception of the process of inquiry, because it is imagination which enables us to reach beyond what is given in an experience and imagine alternative possibilities and means for resolution.²¹ So, thanks to this account, Dewey overcomes yet another dualism – namely, the Reason / imagination dualism recognized as inherent in some of our historically prevalent epistemological constructions.²² Consequently, the exercising of the imagination is most definitely not an obstacle to thinking, and rather aims to develop possible logical solutions, thus remaining crucial to the process of inquiry itself, and ultimately to that of education, too.

¹⁷ J. J. McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey, Volume II. The Lived Experience*, op. cit., p.230.

¹⁸ J. Dewey, *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry*, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 110.

²¹ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 33.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

As a result, we have the idea that immediate suggestions and imagination are just means to logical conclusions and cannot be taken for granted as facts of the case. A reflective thinker or a learner must evaluate solutions through reasoning. Preferably, as a decent basis for developing an in-depth evaluation of a problem-solution, there should be a variety of alternative suggestions. Reasoning therefore provides for a suspension of judgment when evaluating facts, prompting further investigations or a search for more facts, should this prove necessary.²³ The most important thing about this critical analysis is that the very essence of pragmatism emerges here. By the term “essence”, I understand Dewey to comprehend the role of consequences in relation to our conceptions of things along lines similar to those of Charles S. Peirce, whose famous pragmatic maxim says: “consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have”.²⁴ In Dewey’s logic, our conception of these effects just is our whole conception of the object. However, suggestions or ideas should be compared and investigated in terms of what consequences would come after, were they to be applied to solving some problem or other. Thus, in Dewey’s approach, the consequences of the problem-solution constitute its meaning – or, to put it another way, its value. In effect, we may conclude that a problem-solution means the creation of abstract ideas and theories drawn from the observable facts of the case on the basis of imagination and reasoning. According to Bleazby, such an approach engages with the abstract / concrete dualism that is so very pervasive in Western epistemology.²⁵ Thanks to the Deweyian account, it can be plausibly asserted that we do not exclusively think in an abstract kind of way, but instead open ourselves up to meaningful interactions (or transactions) between facts on the one hand, and abstract thinking on the other.

Nevertheless, the process of inquiry does not reach its ultimate terminus with reasoning. It only arrives at a judgment about the problem-solution – and, moreover, this judgment remains preliminary in character. It is just a step on the way to formulating a plan to test the selected idea. We test such ideas with so called *operational facts* or *trial facts*. In *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry* Dewey claims that “the operative force of facts is apparent when we consider that no fact in isolation has evidential potency. Facts are evidential and are tests of an idea as far as they are capable of being organized with one another. The organization can be achieved only as they *interact* with one another”.²⁶ The value of these tests – which are es-

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ch. S. Peirce, *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, „Popular Science Monthly” 12 (January 1878), p. 293.

²⁵ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 35.

²⁶ J. Dewey, *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry*, op. cit., p. 117.

entially falsifications of ideas (hypotheses) – is that they make it possible for us to exercise greater care when applying ideas that could potentially fail as solutions to the problem at hand.

There is also another type of fact which serves as a means for solving problems: namely, *facts of the case*. It is held that such facts furnish an effective way of resolving problematic situations. In the event of any issues or defects arising with respect to a given hypothesis, we can improve it prior to any actual application.

The process of inquiry is not successful or, more precisely, does not count as completed, if we do not observe it working as intended.²⁷ In Dewey's model, ideas that have been tested and have proved successful in their applications are referred to as *knowledge* or *warranted belief*. The meaning, or value, of a hypothesis is just its use or purpose in bringing about the requisite (because intended) consequences. In conclusion, Bleazby notes Dewey's rejection of another dualism: that between theory and practice.²⁸ Dewey is able to bring together both the practical process of inquiry, which requires testing, application, and trials, and imagination, reasoning and theory. Hence, it seems fair to say that inquiry implies, for him, a genuinely reciprocal interaction (or transaction) between the inquirer and his or her environment.

For Dewey, the results of an inquiry are formulated in some *final judgment*. Judgment is always individual: its structure consists of *subject*, *predicate* and *copula*. “The conceptual contents which anticipate a problem-solution and which direct observational operations constitute what has traditionally been called a *predicate*. Their functional and operative correspondence with each other constitutes the *copula*.”²⁹ Judgments formulated this way have their application to judicial verdicts but, from the point of view of education, also develop critical skills, reflective thinking, and reasoning. The outcome of an inquiry is, therefore, not a description but a judgment. As was already mentioned, it takes the form of knowledge or warranted belief. But knowledge for Dewey is not finite: it is temporal, and also enables future inquiry.³⁰ We start out upon an inquiry with a certain body of knowledge already in place. All new judgments and experience are necessarily based on past knowledge. Every completed inquiry enriches our knowledge. By reconstructing our existing knowledge we also partake of what is sometimes referred to as the “constant spiral movement of knowledge.”³¹ In terms of education, all these pro-

²⁷ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ J. Dewey, *Logic, The Theory of Inquiry*, op. cit., p. 224–225.

³⁰ J. Bleazby, *Social Reconstruction Learning. Dualism, Dewey and Philosophy in Schools*, op. cit., p. 37.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 39.

cesses lead to growth in life and in learning. Our nature, environment and contexts all grow, thus throwing up new problems to deal with in new inquiries.

The role of Community in Inquiry

Inquiry plays an important role in helping to make forms of self-critical practice possible within a community.³² Nevertheless, that community need not *itself* be self-critical: rather, what it really *needs* is practice. The existence of community as an element embedded within the social functions of nature has already been remarked, and serves to shed light on the naturalistic and instrumentalistic character of Dewey's philosophy. Individual inquiry is certainly possible, but communal inquiry tends to be superior to the individual's own thinking. It is an engine of growth and self-development. In general it has to be social or communal in character, on account of the fact that it relies on language, scientific operations, and symbol systems.³³ According to Lipman,³⁴ within a community of inquiry we can distinguish certain characteristics. Firstly, the process of inquiry has its own internal goal, which is judgment. Secondly, when compared to discussion or conversation we find that inquiry also exhibits a sense of *direction*: arguments should lead to judgment. Thirdly, communal inquiry is a dialogical process: it may have two or more participants, and dialogue, in contrast to mere conversation, has a logical structure, so that it is governed by certain rules, just as parliamentary debate is. Finally, properly carried out forms of inquiry, whose aim is education, is constitutive of such values as reasonableness, creativity and care. As a result of such a pattern of inquiry, it is held that meanings, etc., will tend towards possessing more general and objective forms of validity than would otherwise be the case. Where such meanings are intersubjective, they result from forms of social interaction that involve coordination with the activities of others. Dewey is a social pragmatist, so he attaches a particular value to communal forms of inquiry, where ideas are tested via communicative intercourse with other individuals. The outcome is itself thus more intersubjective, and so more widely shared. An inquirer is not alone with the test. His or her ideas may be supported, countered, questioned or argued with, and revised. The inquirer empathizes with others, and comes to reflect not only on his or her own ideas, but also on those of others. The community helps the inquirer to develop his or her imagination, and broadens his or her field of experience.

³² M. Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 83.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83–84.

Conclusions

In an article entitled “John Dewey’s instrumentalistic theory of research”, Buksiński claims that Dewey did not really succeed in overcoming the tradition of dualistic theories of cognition, but nevertheless made an original contribution to the methodology of the sciences by creating a new type of methodology – one very different from the foundations of neopositivistic methodology and hypothetical methodology.³⁵ *Pace* Buksiński, however, it must be said that the originality of Dewey’s thought, taken together with its practical application to concrete educational purposes (including, for example, its use in lessons that employ the theory of inquiry), lend justification to the thesis that he did, after all, overcome the subject/object dualism – not to mention other dualisms typical of Western epistemology, such as those of theory/practice, abstract/concrete, reason/imagination, and individual/community. Firstly, we may note here that all inquiry is, in fact, practical, and is based on certain rules of the sort spelt out in the theory of inquiry itself, even as its procedures for testing and investigating mean that it is all the time also engaged with issues of a theoretical sort. Secondly, Dewey demonstrates that we do not just think in an entirely abstract way, but operate also with reference to concrete facts: thus, we interact with our environment meaningfully and purposefully. Thirdly, imagination plays a significant role within inquiry, and itself assists with the development of our reasoning skills. Thanks to the presence of imagination in abstract reasoning, we do not have to constantly confront the failure of our real efforts in the world as we go about exploring the problems we are pursuing in the course of our inquiries. Fourthly, the notion of a communal self implies a rejection of the individual/community dualism. The social aspect of inquiry is clearly a precondition here, even if a human being should decide to conduct their inquiry individually. Yet, since the times of Socrates, there has been a belief that the dialogical aspect of inquiry is superior, and that this entails a more individualistic approach – something that, from Dewey’s perspective, would undoubtedly count as inferior. Most of all, as the very essence of instrumentalism, Dewey rejects the subject/object dualism on the basis of his belief that an interaction – or a kind of transaction – occurs between an organism and its environment: one that is mutually transformative.

A final point worth mentioning here is that in recent decades philosophy for children, as introduced by Matthew Lipman on the basis of Dewey’s philosophy, has been shown to thrive on the basis of the latter’s theory of knowledge and his theory of inquiry, especially where these two have been understood in terms

³⁵ T. Buksiński, *Johna Deweya teoria badań*, „Studia Metodologiczne” 1981, vol. 21, p. 36.

of their connections to other important ideas within his philosophy of education. Yet, precisely what Dewey's philosophy has not so far seen is any application of his thought to philosophy teaching in schools. Indeed, Dewey himself did not include philosophy within his curriculum. It was Lipman who first found his theory useful when teaching philosophy and logic. There, too, one can say that it is only thanks to the issues and insights emerging in the context of his theory of inquiry that many crucial skills – amongst them critical thinking, reasoning, as well as empathy, tolerance for the views of others, creativity and imagination – have the possibility of being properly recognized and developed at all.

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Key words: John Dewey, inquiry, community, anti-dualism, instrumentalism, experience

Abstract: This article sets out to demonstrate the particular importance for education of Dewey's theory of inquiry, considering the latter with reference to its relationship to other elements within his philosophy of education. The author believes that adopting such an approach to Dewey's thought will rescue it from being misunderstood. Her view is that the theory of inquiry, as the most important

concept in Dewey's thought, deserves central attention, but should nevertheless not be presented in isolation from other ideas within his extensive body of philosophical thinking. Hence its presentation here is preceded by an explanation of the nature of instrumentalism – or what might alternatively be called naturalist empiricism. Following on from this, some features of a theory of experience are set out. Then, crucially, the theory of inquiry itself, as the central topic of the article, is elaborated in several stages, all of these being described in some detail in order to comprehensively present the structural character of inquiry. Finally, the theory of inquiry is supplemented by a recognition of the importance of communal inquiry for educational practice.

Throughout, the author also tries to show that Dewey successfully overcame several dualisms in his philosophy, and that the success of such an anti-dualistic approach is, moreover, primarily to be seen in educational practice itself.