MANAGING EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD: A DEWEYAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. In the globalization scenarios we currently face, educational systems are challenged by different and sometimes competing pressures and requests. These call for a deep transformation of the organization, role, and social function of educational systems. Within this context, the very concept of education has come to be understood in different ways, which sometimes distort its moral and social value. In this essay, Maura Striano contends that from a Deweyan perspective, educational transformation must be seen as strictly connected to social change, and education should be understood as a process that facilitates and supports social growth and development. In order to be effective and fruitful, Striano suggests, this transformation must occur from the inside of educational systems and can only be brought about by reflective and inquiry-based inner processes if it is to have a sound moral and social impact within the changing framework of the globalized world.

That education shares in the confusion of transition, and in the demand for reorganization, is a source of encouragement and not of despair. It proves how integrally the school is bound up with the entire movement of modern life.
— John Dewey, The Educational Situation

GLOBALIZATION: A CHALLENGE FOR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Current educational systems are deeply challenged by a worldwide and pervasive process known as “globalization,” which is affecting them in several ways. This process is extremely complex and has therefore been discussed and analyzed from different points of view, some celebrating and emphasizing this phenomenon and others severely attacking and denigrating it. As Thomas Friedman effectively points out,

"globalization is everything and its opposite. It can be incredibly empowering and incredibly coercive. It can democratize opportunity and democratize panic. . . . It leaves you behind faster and faster, and it catches up to you faster and faster. While it is homogenizing cultures, it is also enabling people to share their individuality farther and wider. It makes us want to chase after the Lexus more intensely than ever and cling to our olive trees more tightly than ever."¹

Globalization, indeed, can be seen as a constitutive feature of the modern world and should be understood as a multipronged and long-term process, encompassing several large developments — driven by various forces — that manifest themselves in many different arenas of social activity, including cultural, economic, and political, as well as educational settings.² The three main driving forces


². The meaning of the term “globalization” is itself a topic in global discussion, since it may refer to “real” processes, to ideas that justify them, or to a way of thinking about them. An interesting overview of the term “globalization,” including its philosophical and moral implications, is in William Scheuerman, “Globalization,” in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2006), http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/globalization/.
commonly acknowledged within the scientific debate regarding the development of globalization processes are deterritorialization, interconnectedness, and social acceleration.

Deterritorialization is a term introduced by Jan Scholte, who explains that territory — in the traditional sense of a geographically identifiable location — no longer constitutes the whole of “social space” in which human activities take place. Global relations can therefore be understood as “trans-border exchanges without distance” since globalization advances the spread of new forms of nonterritorial social activity, embedded and developed within many different territorial and nonterritorial communities. Consequently, educational activities and practices play dual roles, expressing particular needs and representing distinct social and cultural issues for specific territorial configurations, as well as for broader communities not territorially bound but very active and powerful within the educational processes.

Writing from this perspective, David Held and his coauthors note that globalization can be seen as a “process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions — assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact — generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity.” This process is thus leading toward the development of transworld or transborder relations that result in deep-seated changes in the way people live, experience, and understand social space, and these changes are having a very strong impact on social and political practices.

According to Leslie Sklair, all the above-mentioned processes are driving a distinct set of changes that can be studied from four perspectives: world-systems, global culture, global society, and global capitalism. These changes refer to a simultaneous deep transformation of the world’s ecological and political assets, cultural references, social systems, and economic scenarios in the context of increasing transnational exchange and interdependence.


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The transformation of the world system assets, which as Immanuel Wallerstein points out have undergone several crises of contraction, is nowadays stimulating a deep struggle inside what had been acknowledged as the “core” of the system, as well as the opening up of new political scenarios, thus leading to a complex readjustment of national and transnational relations, policies, and strategies.

Simultaneously, the expansion of communication is increasing the rate at which cultures change, both enhancing the level of cultural homogeneity in the system and reducing the extent to which the most common cultural attributes tend to predominate. We can therefore see how globalization is determining sound cultural changes and producing a new cultural heterogeneity through interaction and integration processes, which lead not only to new cultural mixtures, but also to deep cultural conflicts. According to John Tomlinson, since it is true that a global culture is not about to emerge, we instead see the emergence of many different “modes of identification” that contribute to the development of various cultural aggregates. This issue is highly relevant to educational systems, since they have always involved processes of identification and participation in cultural traditions.

Globalization is also a powerful force of change for social structures (such as educational systems), producing an ever more rapid acceleration of social life, taking many different forms that vary in magnitude, impact, and regularity. Anthony Giddens has defined this process as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” From this perspective, we can see that globalization processes could facilitate and support the commitment and participation of several social actors within a series of actions and events, even if separated by great distances in space and time, thus leading to new forms of political agency and governance. In this scenario, educational institutions are required to respond to requests posed both at a national and transnational level by different stakeholders and organizations, as well as at a local level by particular communities and social organisms.

Currently we can see two different trends in the development of educational systems: One is the passage from national control to transnational control and guidance. The other trend is a progressive decentralization of the governance of educational systems, which is strictly connected with a tendency toward privatization of educational institutions and practices (see, for example, the growing phenomenon of home schooling) as well as the involvement of other agents in the educational process.

World systems changes have made it possible for supranational organizations and actors to have a greater impact on educational policies and choices, thus strongly affecting the development and change of educational systems at a national and international level. This means that at a national level the educational agenda, goals, and curricula have been and will continue to be more and more deeply influenced by supranational guidelines and frames of reference. To take one example, the World Education Forum, taking a planetary perspective, has established as one of its main Millennium Development Goals the achievement of Education for All.\textsuperscript{10} In response to this goal, national, international, and transnational policies in the short, medium, and long term are focusing on the promotion of educational opportunities at different levels.

Moreover, within the Dakar Framework for Action, one of the six goals for global development is “improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that [there are] recognized and measurable learning outcomes.”\textsuperscript{11} This implies a strong focus on quality indicators and standards that represent a normative frame of reference for educational change. In Europe, for example, the European Commission educational policies are strongly affecting national educational agendas, requiring educational systems of member states to become increasingly comparable and competitive on the basis of a shared framework of guidelines and requirements.

Educational policies are also becoming closely interconnected with social development policies: issues such as human capital development, social development, and social inclusion are therefore extremely powerful, and the acquisition of social skills, as well as the development of human potential, are acknowledged as the main educational priorities in relevant documents representing the agenda of the leading transnational and international organizations (such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and the European Union). As a consequence, educational systems are required to be increasingly responsive to social needs in terms of instilling knowledge and competences that should sustain personal and professional development.

Educational policies and practices are, moreover, widely oriented to advancement and innovation across a range of perspectives. Therefore the acknowledgment that education promotes cultural, economic, and social development — both for advanced and less advanced countries — is considered the basis for social policies. On this view, educational systems can effectively contribute to the creation of a global network of knowledge, conceived as a powerful driver for global innovation, problem solving, and expanding prosperity around the world.

\textsuperscript{10} The World Education Forum [Dakar, Senegal, April 2000] was the first event in education at the beginning of the new century and has been the most important to date. By adopting the Dakar Framework for Action, the 1,100 participants involved reaffirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015; this entrusted UNESCO with the overall responsibility for coordinating the different international agents and sustaining the global momentum.

In this scenario we see that several stakeholders are imposing their demands and goals on educational systems, which now must face different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations and requests. These tendencies are influencing a deep change in the function of educational institutions, which are required to redefine their identity and their mission.

In particular, as Nelly Stromquist and Karen Monkman point out, “two actors are imposing themselves on educational policy agendas: the market and the transnational corporation. The changes they are encouraging affect not only the formal educational system but also the construction and restructuring of local cultures.” Educational systems are therefore challenged by several demands: since economic development is seen as closely connected with the achievement and development of specialized abilities and skills, educational policies are more and more economically driven; therefore agents and institutions representing economic interests at a national and international level are gaining a stronger role in defining educational policies and goals (for example, the World Bank’s educational agenda) with the risk that education is included in a global market strategy more than in a social development strategy.

Critics of globalization have pointed out a series of possible risks that derive from these processes: first, the risk of considering human capital development merely in the sense of acquisition of a valuable repertory of skills to be used in the labor market; second, the risk that educational curricula and practices would yield to economic demands more than to cultural and social demands; and third, the risk of an “educational divide” between richer and more advanced countries and developing countries whose educational systems are less competitive and market-oriented.

From this perspective, Catherine Odora-Hoppers notes that if globalization is encouraging a strong orientation of educational systems toward economic development, social development, and innovation, it is also “erasing two other important functions of education: the transmission of the normative heritage of particular societies and the development of critical thought,” and this represents a very powerful threat to its traditionally acknowledged cultural and social mandate. Many (sometimes conflicting) pressures are at stake and this imposes a change in the organizational structure as well as in the curricular planning of educational institutions, in particular formal institutions, such as schools and universities. If the global trend is toward the promotion of lifelong and lifewide educational opportunities, it is clear that not only the formal educational agencies and institutions, but also the nonformal and informal ones, will be called upon in order to warrant the “education for all” Millennium Development Goal.


The necessity to respond to new social demands is thus requiring the involvement of new actors and stakeholders in the educational process as well as the definition of new educational goals that impose a stronger integration of the different educational agencies and subsystems operating on a formal, nonformal, and informal basis through a reflective negotiation of perspectives, languages, and codes.

Educational systems are thus called upon to manage a complex process of negotiation and transaction of goals, requests, and pressures at different levels (cultural, economic, political, social, and the like), which in turn requires the systems to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities and social functions through an awareness and reflective use of new frames of reference, new languages, and new forms of thinking. In this context, educational transformation requires an in-depth exploration in order to be effectively understood and managed on the basis of an appropriate and consistent theoretical perspective.

For the above-mentioned purpose, Dewey’s ideas appear to be extremely powerful and significant, since they can help us in exploring educational issues within a cultural, political, and social framework that seems surprisingly current 150 years after his birth. Indeed, the relevance of Dewey’s thought, for our own time, can be effectively verified by putting it to work, not just through academic research, but on the basis of the problems emerging within life contexts in the contemporary world.

In particular, the discernment of newly emerging scenarios for a developing modernity, which anticipate the main features of globalization, is extremely interesting with respect to educational challenges and transformations: these scenarios can be better understood from a Deweyan perspective.

The Role of Education in the Globalized World

Do we still need education? What is the place of education? What do we mean by education? These questions are particularly relevant and pressing in the global-world scenarios and require in-depth exploration, in all their complexity. In order to find appropriate answers, we should first try to understand what is currently meant, or should be meant, by the term education. If education processes — as they are widely conceived — are driving forces for human and social development, they should be considered as empowering processes, aimed at the most complete and successful expression and use of human and social potential. This means that education should be considered as a practice of exploration and appreciation of the resources that individuals and communities own and are able to use in order to activate and sustain methods of development and growth.

This also means that education should be considered neither simply a socially acknowledged practice that can be used to transmit experience, knowledge, rules, and values, nor as a practice focused merely on the acquisition, development, and use of knowledge, abilities, and skills in a specific developmental area (which would limit its sphere of influence and impact on social systems if we consider, for example, the high risk of identifying social development with economic growth and expansion) but in all the areas of human living. The primary task of education, then, is to promote awareness, growth, responsibility, and self-governance.
Therefore, it assumes a strong social value, since it represents the opportunity for human societies to promote innovation and change — through the energies and the ideas of their members — since they are focused and directed toward social development.

Through education, human societies also have the opportunity to reflect upon their frames of reference and to negotiate them, to acknowledge and share knowledge, and to promote learning. In order to clarify this issue, we see that Dewey’s contribution is extremely relevant and up-to-date.

For example, Dewey’s conception of education is visible early in *School and Society*:

The statement so frequently made that education means “drawing out” is excellent, if we mean simply to contrast it with the process of pouring in. But, after all, it is difficult to connect the idea of drawing out with the ordinary doings of the child of three, four, seven, or eight years of age. He is already running over, spilling over, with activities of all kinds.

He is not a purely latent being whom the adult has to approach with great caution and skill in order gradually to draw out some hidden germ of activity. The child is already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his activities, of giving them direction. Through direction, through organized use, they tend toward valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression.14

We see that Dewey’s educational perspective is focused on education intended as a practice of directing and facilitating activities that progressively lead to an organized and reflective use of inner forces and potentialities, focusing on interests and problems emerging from human experience. If this is to be intended as education, “nothing compares with it as a means of arousing the child to a positive sense of his own power, and encouraging him in expression and construction.”15

If we transfer Dewey’s perspective from the child to human beings in general (assuming that they may all be potentially educated), we see that it is possible to consider education as a process actively involving the individuals whose experiences, forces, and endeavors have to be acknowledged and considered as forms of agency that need to be better organized and directed. This means that education should not come from the outside, but from the inside of human experiences: it should be selected as a tool for clarification, direction, and understanding of human experience and action in different contexts.

Educational actions are therefore planned and performed on the basis of the main interests driving human activities from childhood to adulthood, which Dewey recognized in “the interest in conversation or communication; in inquiry, or finding out things; in making things, or construction; and in artistic expression,” considering them the “natural resources, the uninvested capital, upon the exercise


of which depends the active growth of the child.”16 Building on such interests, both operational procedures as well as knowledge, rules, traditions, and values can be mediated through educational processes, since they can be considered as resources and tools that help clarification and understanding of experiences within different cultural and social contexts.

As Lewis Hahn points out, through education

Dewey hopes to develop persons who are thoroughly efficient and serviceable members of society, ones capable of taking charge of themselves and leading others, not only able to adapt to changing circumstances but with power to shape and direct them. They should be persons who have force of character, judgment, and emotional responsiveness.17

We can see that education, in Dewey’s terms, has an intrinsic moral, and therefore social, implication, as he clearly stated in *Moral Principles in Education*:

> We need to know the social situations in which the individual will have to use ability to observe, recollect, imagine, and reason, in order to have any way of telling what a training of mental powers actually means. What holds in the illustration of this particular definition of education holds good from whatever point of view we approach the matter. Only as we interpret school activities with reference to the larger circle of social activities to which they relate do we find any standard for judging their moral significance.18

The Deweyan idea that education is itself a moral force has strong implications in the global world’s scenarios, since one of the most challenging needs for global societies is, as John Tomlinson recognizes, to nurture “competent moral agents” in the “global neighborhood.” Educational processes therefore can be seen as the only agents that could support individuals and groups in both being “open to the diversity of global cultures” and having a commitment to belong to the world as a whole on the basis of a “moral imagination” that could “sustain a cosmopolitan ethical practice” from a “locally situated lifeworld.”19

As William Scheuerman points out, we can see that Dewey had been discussing the risks brought about by globalization for individuals and communities regarding political and social commitment in *The Public and Its Problems*.20 Dewey acknowledged that one of the most challenging questions posed by globalization was connected to the risk that the recent changes in the temporal and spatial conditions of human activity could threaten political participation, and therefore wondered about the possibility of working out new conditions of participation through educational policies and practices.21


This point is also addressed by Leonard Waks who, analyzing *Democracy and Education*, recognizes that Dewey was clearly aware that the conditions of association, transportation, commerce, and communication in the twentieth century could lead to a “physical annihilation of space;”\(^{22}\) and the widening of society would weaken the efficiency and reach of national institutions, making them less effective at guaranteeing human rights.\(^{23}\)

For Dewey, a true, disseminated democratic project could be seen as an effective response only if it could work as the “equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which keep men from seeing the full import of what they are doing” (\(DE, 93\)); therefore, “the democratic concept under conditions of global association implies a parallel political concept — an international state of federated humanity.”\(^{24}\) On the basis of this assumption, Waks notes that for Dewey “the positive ideal to be realized in the world order is ‘the furtherance of the breadth and depth of human intercourse’ irrespective of class or race, geography or national boundaries,” which would overcome the negative consequences of globalization for the public sphere.\(^{25}\)

The educational implications of this issue are further explored by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, as the aims and values of educational practice are seen in a strong connection with their social impact upon the construction of more equal conditions of human living. As Sidney Hook points out:

> the equality that Dewey speaks of is not one of fact or ideal goal but of moral equality among human beings whose value or worth is incommensurable and cannot be quantified. For him a democratic society is one whose institutions are so organized that they exhibit an equality of concern for all human beings to develop themselves to their full stature as persons, free to choose patterns of life that are compatible.\(^{26}\)

In this view, education can be seen as the opportunity that each society gives to its members to take care of their individual growth as well as of the enlargement and growth of the public sphere: “By various agencies, unintentional and designed, a society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideals. Education is thus a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating process. All of these words mean that it implies attention to the conditions of growth” (\(DE, 15\)).

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Growth is the core of Dewey’s educational perspective, which can be acknowledged as lifelong and lifewide:

The fulfillment of growing is taken to mean an accomplished growth: that is to say, an Ungrowth, something which is no longer growing. The futility of the assumption is seen in the fact that every adult resents the imputation of having no further possibilities of growth, and so far as he finds that they are closed to him mourns the fact as evidence of loss, instead of falling back on the achieved as adequate manifestation of power. Why an unequal measure for child and man? (DE, 48)

According to Dewey, again: “this means [i] that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that [ii] the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming” (DE, 55).

Education cannot have any end outside its own. If other ends are at stake (for example, cultural, economic, ideological, religious, or the like), then those that are thought to be educational practices are indeed something else. Therefore, we can speak about education only if growth (at an individual and collective level) in itself is considered to be the only goal in the pursuit of social development: “Hence education means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age” (DE, 57).

This means that each society — encompassing the entire sphere of human experience (public and private) — should create and promote better conditions for growth for its members, institutions, and organizations. This perspective is particularly relevant in the globalization scenarios, which enhance the possibility to have lifelong and lifewide opportunities to grow, learn, and change through educational experiences. As Dewey stated, education can be seen as a process of continuous “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (DE, 83).

Experience is therefore the core of educational processes, but it must be dynamic, propulsive, and reflective. Educational processes, according to a Deweyan perspective, are processes, or reconstruction and reorganization of human experiences, which call for a continuous reframing in order to always add and compare new perspectives and new points of view.

This is very relevant to current scenarios, since globalization — in its ambiguity and complexity — calls for a continuous reframing of human experiences in order to help individuals and communities in becoming increasingly aware and reflective as well as in developing, negotiating, and sharing new understandings of the world’s conditions for better human living and development. Dewey was very critical, but also very clear, in suggesting guidelines for a true and full accomplishment and development of modernity, which can be effectively achieved through sound and reflective educational practices and tools.

MANAGING EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A DEWEYAN PERSPECTIVE

The transformation of educational systems and practices in the global-world scenarios requires a sound examination. As we have seen, this process is very complex because it involves different (sometimes opposite) trends: economic
advancement and innovation (which impose a strong focus on a competence-driven education and on professional training and development); transmission of social norms and rules and of cultural traditions (which requires a focus on shared educational goals and on the better means to achieve them, even within multicultural contexts); and personal and social growth (which requires a focus on the needs and the resources of particular individuals and groups).

Educational systems are required to be more and more integrated in their different dimensions (formal, nonformal, and informal), which are expected to negotiate and share educational goals, languages, and practices among different agencies and institutions (schools, families, local administrations, local communities, professional associations, and professional communities) in order to promote a complete process of growth. Even in the global scenarios, we see that educational agencies and institutions are acquiring a new social role since they sometimes represent the only opportunity to promote cultural and social growth in a particular territorial area, while they are also included in a broader cultural, political, and social context. They are also asked to operate at the local level and to respond to the educational needs of specific communities. This requires that educational agencies and institutions must constantly negotiate and refocus educational goals, practices, and curricula in order to cope with different requests and pressures, therefore redefining their social identity and mission.

If it is true that educational systems must be increasingly flexible on the basis of a globally shared framework of common goals and common quality models and standards, it is also true that educational emergences and needs are specifically grounded in particular cultural and social contexts and territories that have specific meanings. Moreover, the issues at stake in the global scenarios challenge educational systems, calling for a transformation of educational curricula and practices that are asked to confront and integrate different requests: the acquisition and development of general and transversal abilities with very specific specializations, required by the changing labor market; the acquisition of a cultural background with the development of practical skills and competences on an empirical basis; and the use of humanistic and scientific, narrative and paradigmatic approaches to human experiences and cultural traditions. All these elements must be integrated in order to have a more complete and clear understanding of human life and problems; moreover, access to specific forms of knowledge should be supported with a competent access to the tools helpful in managing and using that knowledge. Within this framework, the evaluation of learning processes should be focused both on the process as well as on the content and the outcomes of learning; educational processes should be focused on both individual characteristics and needs as well as on social requirements.

Surprisingly, this scenario is very similar to the one depicted by Dewey in *The School and Society*, where he pointed out the necessity of “unity” of educational processes:

> Just as the parts are separated, so do the ideals differ — moral development, practical utility, general culture, discipline, and professional training. These aims are each especially represented in some distinct part of the system of education, and with the growing interaction
of the parts, each is supposed to afford a certain amount of culture, discipline, and utility. But
the lack of fundamental unity is witnessed in the fact that one study is still considered good
for discipline, and another for culture. . . . The unity of education is dissipated, and the studies
become centrifugal; so much of this study to secure this end, so much of that to secure another,
until the whole becomes a sheer compromise and patchwork between contending aims and
disparate studies. The great problem in education on the administrative side is to secure the
unity of the whole, in the place of a sequence of more or less unrelated and overlapping parts
and thus to reduce the waste arising from friction, reduplication and transitions that are not
properly bridged. ([55, 45]

It is, thus, only by mediating, negotiating, and reflecting that educational sys-
tems may advance and develop, according to the different and apparently opposite
forces involved in the globalization process. The main problem in education is
therefore integrating interests, needs, and responses, activities and practices, in a
complex but consistent whole, which can adequately support individual and social
growth. The transformation of educational systems cannot be brought about from
the outside, but it must emerge from the inside and be sustained by a sound
process of reflection as well as the integration of different internal and external
forces and tendencies (for example, theory and practice, tradition and innovation,
culture and society, individual and collective, and so on). [27]

Dewey was clearly aware of this necessity on the basis of his experience during
the Chicago years, when he developed the challenging experiment of the labora-
tory school. This experience was extremely powerful for him since it grounded his
pedagogical reflection on a scientific basis, making clearly visible the epistemic
relation between theory and practice, experimenting and thinking, in educational
practices. In *The School and Society*, Dewey referred to the laboratory school as
the outcome of a process of empirical inquiry involving scholars, administrators,
teachers, and students in a common enterprise: “We have attempted to find out by
trying, by doing not alone by discussion and theorizing — whether these problems
may be worked out, and how they may be worked out” ([SS, 62]). Therefore the
“new education” was not the application of a general theoretical framework of
pedagogical ideas but the acknowledgment and organization of inner forces lying
scattered within educational systems. As Dewey wrote,

> there is no new education in definite and supreme existence. What we have is certain vital
tendencies. These tendencies ought to work together; each stands for a phase of reality
and contributes a factor of efficiency. But because of lack of organization, because of the
lack of unified insight upon which organization depends, these tendencies are diverse and
tangential. ([ES, 267]

From a Deweyan perspective, each transformation is therefore the outcome of a
process of insight and inquiry that begins with the effective problems and needs
emerging from educational contexts and practices and explored in an “educational

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27. The problem, for Dewey, was to join together “the culture factor [by which is meant acquaintance
with the best that has been thought and said and done in the past] and the practical factor — or,
more truly speaking, the social factor, the factor of adaptation to the present need of the people.”
John Dewey, *The Educational Situation* (1901), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 1,
ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), 302. This work will be cited
as *ES* in the text for all subsequent references.
laboratory” where different “vital tendencies” could be expanded, developed, integrated, and reorganized.

Dewey clarified this point, writing that

The assumption of an educational laboratory is rather that enough is known of the conditions and modes of growth to make intelligent inquiry possible; and that it is only by acting upon what is already known that more can be found out. The chief point is such experimentation as will add to our reasonable convictions. The demand is to secure arrangements that will permit and encourage freedom of investigation; that will give some assurance that important facts will not be forced out of sight; conditions that will enable the educational practice indicated by the inquiry to be sincerely acted upon, without the distortion and suppression arising from undue dependence upon tradition and preconceived notions. It is in this sense that the school would be an experimental station in education. (SS, 69)

From a Deweyan perspective, significant changes and innovations should be understood as the outcomes of multiple “experimental stations” situated within educational systems, where educational problems could be freely and responsibly investigated.

In these “experimental stations” — through a reflective use of a scientific approach to educational problems — educational practices themselves become less and less routinary, and more and more innovative, producing new forms of knowledge and understanding. Dewey pointed out this issue clearly in *The Educational Situation*:

I have already referred to the fact that we are living in a period of applied science. What this means for present purposes is that the professions, the practical occupations of men, are becoming less and less empirical routines, or technical facilities acquired through unintelligent apprenticeship. They are more and more infused with reason, more and more illuminated by the spirit of inquiry and reason. They are dependent upon science, in a word. To decline to recognize this intimate connection of professions in modern life with the discipline and culture that come from the pursuit of truth for its own sake, is to be at least one century behind the times. (ES, 311)

On this basis, educational transformation may be effectively brought about through the involvement of professionals, conceived as agents of inquiry and reflection.

Educational agencies and, within them, the various communities of educational professionals, together with administrators, politicians, and other stakeholders, can be seen as leading forces promoting innovation from the inside of educational systems if — and only if — the conditions for a free and sound process of inquiry are created and maintained at different levels. The first of these conditions is, according to Dewey, “to study the existing situation as students, not as partisans, and having located the vital factors in it, consider what it is that makes them at the present juncture antagonistic competitors instead of friendly cooperators” (ES, 267).

The outcome of inquiry (which is actually an educational inquiry) is a composition of apparently opposite and conflicting ideas and positions in a shared framework, which would be considered acceptable and valid for different actors and communities in a global perspective. Educational inquiry is, indeed, a matter
of goals, ideals, and values that ought to orient and sustain the development and transformation of educational systems within a particular social context.

This requires a specific moral and social role to be assigned to educational agencies and educational professionals, considering them not only as knowledge-construction agents (or “knowledge professionals”) but as moral and social agents, actively participating in the shaping of the educational ideals and goals acknowledged and shared in a local as well as a global community. On this basis, the process of inquiry itself can be seen as an important driver for integration within educational systems.

Dewey was firmly convinced of the powerful and transformative function of inquiry at different levels and within multiple contexts. In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, for example, he assumed that “there is no inquiry that does not involve the making of some change in environing conditions.” Environing conditions can be modified by a critical and sound process, which influences social organizations and policies at different levels, generating a complex reframing of the positions and tendencies that have determined the “educational situation.” In *The School and Society* Dewey pointed out that educational changes are determined by economic and social changes occurring on a worldwide basis, drawing a very vivid picture of the new century transformations:

Even as to its feebler beginnings, this change is not much more than a century old, in many of its most important aspects it falls within the short span of those now living. One can hardly believe there has been a revolution in all history so rapid, so extensive, so complete. Through it the face of the earth is making over, even as to its physical forms, political boundaries are wiped out and moved about, as if they were indeed only lines on a paper map; population is hurriedly gathered into cities from the ends of the earth; habits of living are altered with startling abruptness and thoroughness; the search for the truths of nature is infinitely stimulated and facilitated, and their application to life made not only practicable, but commercially necessary. Even our moral and religious ideas and interests, the most conservative because the deepest-lying things in our nature, are profoundly affected. That this revolution should not affect education in some other than a formal and superficial fashion is inconceivable. (SS, 8)

This position is reinforced in *The Educational Situation*, where Dewey noted that “the educational problem is not a result of anything within our own conscious wish or intention, but of the conditions in the contemporary world” (*ES*, 304), and as such it must be approached and studied. This means that educational problems and transformations can only be explored and understood if connected with the changing processes affecting the world as a whole, integrating a local-inner perspective with a global-external perspective. This exploration should be brought about through a shared process of inquiry by individuals and groups actively involved in educational problems and transformations at different levels. Within this framework, educational agencies and institutions could be considered as inquiring communities whose deliberations and understandings come to have an increasingly relevant impact on educational systems as a whole.

From this perspective, they would actively participate, both as cultural and moral agents, in the process of educational transformation involving the whole world, which is a process of social development whose ultimate goal is the construction of a “social democracy” (ES, 311). Through educational inquiry, educational transformation could lead to a shared “common heritage, a common work, and a common destiny” for all (ES, 311), contributing to the definition and achievement of the most challenging educational ideal of the New Millennium.

To implement this approach, we acknowledge the necessity to rethink Dewey’s ideas within the globalization framework, not simply as a tribute, but as the only authentic Deweyan way to keep his memory alive: reconstructing his theories, his interpretive hypotheses, in order to make them useful within contemporary scenarios.