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(summary)

EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN JOHN DEWEY'S WORKS

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EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN JOHN DEWEY'S WORKS (1859-1952)

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KEY WORDS

The American school of pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, instrumentalism, democratic liberalism, progressive thought, democratic education, scientific method, intelligence, reconstruction in philosophy, democratic state, critical thinking and education, Dewey's Laboratory School of Chicago, experimental pedagogy, Jean Piaget, civic learning, voluntarism and community service, Youth Civic Engagement (YCE), Public Achievement (PA), Youth-in-Government (YIG), Youth Science Center (YSC), civic education, pragmatic liberalism, guild socialism, pluralistic state and communitarian thesis, anti-fascism, morals, industrial education, social reconstruction, pacifism, war, democratic values, creative democracy, rejection of communism, higher education and democracy, education reform, etc.

SYNTHESES OF THE MAIN PARTS

The present doctoral work, entitled *EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN JOHN DEWEY'S WORKS* and completed under the scientific coordination of Professor Andrei MARGA, PhD, the Rector of Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, intends to analyze the relevance of the instrumental, educational and political philosophy of the famous American philosopher, psychologist, pedagogue and political journalist, John Dewey (a very complex scientific personality) to the contemporary national and international, cultural, educational and political contexts. Although John Dewey's name is connected with the former century, many critics considering him irrelevant to the contemporary scenery, John Dewey continues to fascinate the national and international research, his works revealing a multitude of meanings.

Education and Politics in John Dewey's Works is among the first Romanian approaches of this type. We have opted for John Dewey due to the complex character

of his works, and also due to the fact that his political writings are less familiar (if not at the least familiar) in Romania. The title seemed appropriate to us because the education and the politics are complementary and synergetic fields in John Dewey's view.

The main difficulties which have intervened in the completion of this doctoral thesis have consisted of the necessity to carry out a research stage in the United States of America, respectively at the Center for Dewey Studies within Southern Illinois University Carbondale, a center exclusively dedicated to the life and works of the famous American scholar.

The degree of the issue research has been identified by a profound analysis of the works, articles and dictionaries published in the USA, Romania and other countries, the focus falling on the analysis of those published in the USA. For this reason, the present doctoral dissertation has been conceived and carried forth in English. The interdisciplinary research has been based on theories, concepts, principles, approaches, and ideas within the sphere of pragmatism/instrumentalism, psychology, education, pedagogy, civic education and political philosophy/science. The following scientific methods have been used for the accomplishment of this research: the scientific documentation, the analysis and synthesis, the synchronic and diachronic methods, the chronological method, the comparative method, as well as the case study. The epistemological and theoretical sources of this research have included: John Dewey's fundamental works as to the instrumental philosophy, the educational philosophy, and the political philosophy; the exegeses of John Dewey's works existent in the Romanian and American specialized literature; and the reference studies from the specialized literature specific to philosophy, education, psychology, pedagogy and political science.

In Romania, the preoccupation with John Dewey's works has been mainly manifested within the fields of philosophy and education: *Reconstructia Pragmatică A Filosofiei* (*The Pragmatic Reconstruction of Philosophy,* Andrei Marga, Iaşi, 1998); *Filosofia americană vol. I: Filosofia americană clasică* (*The American Philosophy vol. I: The Classical American Philosophy,* Andrei Marga, Bucureşti, 2006); *Fundamentele pedagogice ale dezvoltării teoriei şi metodologiei curriculumului. Contribuţia lui John Dewey* (*The Pedagogical Fundaments of the Development of Curriculum Theory and Methodology,* Mirela Mihăescu, Chişinău, 2010); *Doctrine*

pedagogice (*Pedagogical Doctrines,* Ion Albulescu, Bucureşti, 2007); *John Dewey ca pedagog. Viata si opera sa.* Studiu omagial cu prilejul implinirii varstei de 80 de ani (*John Dewey the Pedagogue. His Life and Works.* Nicolae Cretulescu, Bucuresti, 1940); *Antologia pedagogiei americane contemporane* (*The Antology of Contemporary American Pedagogy,* Ion Stanciu, Vasile Nicolescu, Nicolae Sacalis; Bucuresti, 1971); *Scoala si doctrinele pedagogice in secolul XX* (*The school and pedagogical doctrines of the 20th century;* Gh. Ion Stanciu, Bucuresti, 1995); "Scoala experimentala de la Chicago – un model educativ in spiritul teoriei si metodologiei curriculumului" ("The Experimental School of Chicago – an educative model in the spirit of the curriculum theory and methodology"; M. Mihaiescu, in Revista "Invatamantul primar", Bucuresti, 2008); "John Dewey – Un filosof al experientei". In *Trei scrieri despre educatie* ("John Dewey – a Philosopher of Experience". In *Three Writings on Education*; Vasile Nicolescu, Bucuresti, 1977); etc.

The most recent American works that include the educational and political aspects of John Dewey's works are:

1. ***Higher Education and Democracy: Essays on Service-Learning and Civic Engagement*** (John Saltmarsh Edward Zlotkowski, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA; Feb. 2011; 360p.).

2. ***Becoming Citizens, Deepening the Craft of Youth Civic Engagement*** (Ross VeLure Roholt, Roudy W. Hildreth and Michael Baizerman; simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge, New York, 2009; 186 p.).

3. ***Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform*** (John L. Puckett, Ira Harkavy, and Lee Benson; Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2007; 160 p.).

The latest American works on Dewey's technical philosophy also need to be mentioned here:

1. Hickman, Larry A., Neubert, Stefan, and Reich, Kersten – ***John Dewey Between Pragmatism and Constructivism*** (Fordham University Press, New York, 2009; Approaches and Connections between Pragmatism and Constructivism; Dewey's Constructivism: From the Reflex Arc Concept to Social Constructivism; Pragmatism, Constructivism, and the Philosophy of Technology; Pragmatism, Constructivism, and the Theory of Culture; etc.)

2. Hickman, Larry A. - ***Philosophical Tools for a Technological***

Culture. Putting Pragmatism to Work (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis. Published in 2001 by Larry A. Hickman; Philosophy in a High-Tech World; Technology and Community Life; Productive Pragmatism, Critical Theory, and *Agape;* Art, Techno-science, and Social Action; Techno-science Education for a Lifelong Curriculum; Literacy, Mediacy, and Technological Determinism; Populism and the Cult of the Expert; The Next Technological Revolution; etc.).

The first chapter of the thesis, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Instrumentalism*, analyses in three sub-chapters, the current research condition of John Dewey's scientific values; it emphasizes Dewey's place among the American pragmatists, the Deweyan philosophical themes and concepts (without which the proper understanding of John Dewey's educational and political philosophy would not be possible), as well as the connection between education and politics in John Dewey's works.

The second chapter of the thesis, *John Dewey's Philosophy of Education*, is very comprehensive. The nine sub-chapters focus on: Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Education, the relationship between Dewey and American education, Dewey's most significant educational works ("My Pedagogic Creed", *Democracy and Education*), the notion of social individual, Dewey as teacher, the relation between critical thinking and education, Dewey as educator of nations, Dewey's denigration in Russia, Dewey and progressive education today, Dewey's Laboratory School of Chicago (the social nature of learning, the school as a social community, character education, intellectual freedom and responsibility, thinking as problem-solving, Dewey's school as a learning community, etc.), and Dewey's lasting legacy: civic learning in *Democracy and education*, and Youth Civic Engagement (YCE: Public Achievement (PA), Minnesota Youth-in-Government (YIG), Youth Science Center (YSC).

The third chapter of the thesis, *John Dewey's Political Philosophy*, comprises five sub-chapters focusing on the political influences that shaped Dewey's later political views, Dewey's pragmatic liberalism, Dewey's guild socialism, the pluralistic state and communitarian thesis in his vision, as well as an analysis of Dewey's most significant political writings/essays, whence Dewey's pertinent opinions regarding fascism and communism conspicuously come out.

The three comprising chapters of this doctoral thesis substantiate the contemporary relevance of the Deweyan instrumental, educational and political philosophy within the national and international, cultural, educational and political

contexts; these chapters could add solutions to the multiple social, economic, educational and political issues confronting present-day Romania.

The thesis focuses on Dewey's educational and political works out of a very strong reason: education and politics are correlated and complementary fields, in his viewpoint. The foremost American philosopher of democracy attempted, throughout his lifelong career, **to further the realization of democracy in every sphere of life**. His democratic philosophy was designed, besides encompassing the traditional concerns of politics, to provide a democratic understanding of education, ethics, logic, aesthetics, religion and many other fields of concern. His comprehensive political intention affected all the elements of his work. His politically programmatic philosophy relates to social progress as the true end of philosophy. He rejected traditional political philosophy because he was convinced that it needed to be modernized. In his viewpoint, social progress can only be achieved by "the method of intelligence"; the frustration of "the method of intelligence" must be traced in the flaws of the political practice[1].

John Dewey's works have always been connected with the scientific method. Dewey's mature philosophy was created after joining the faculty at Columbia University, thus becoming even more active in American politics and social causes. He came to believe that ideas influenced human life, that they could shape the world and give value to the daily activities conducted by people, from education to politics. Dewey and the Columbia University scholars - with whom he founded the New School for Social Research in 1918 (New York City) - were promoters of more academic freedom, thus advancing the idea that higher education could be improved in the United States[2].

"**Growth**" is the climax of Dewey's reconstruction in philosophy. *The Public and Its Problems* highlights the fact that "growth" takes place within **associations** such as the family, the clan, the school, the church, the neighborhood, the small village, etc., which are "the chief agencies of nurture"/"growth": "*there is something deep within human nature itself which pulls toward settled relationships*". Dewey initially excluded these immediate associations from the political sphere: "*the face to face relationships have consequences which generate **a community of interests**, **a sharing of values**, too direct and vital to occasion a need for political*

[1] Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, *The History of Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987, pp. 851-854.
[2] Ibidem, p. 60.

organization[3]". But these groupings subsequently gave rise to the need for political organization: school and church may dispute their spheres of influence, which is contrary to the "method of intelligence"/a peaceful resolution of conflict. The regulation and supervision of associations can only be effected by **the state**, which is **a "secondary" form of association** legitimized to assist the functioning of the other forms of association/organization. For Dewey, **pluralism** provides a protection against the totalitarianism specific to traditional political philosophy which permitted the absorption of associations into the State, of the social values into the political ones. By pluralism, the State is prevented from its glorification. Dewey locates "growth" within associations, since "*the state, instead of being all absorbing and inclusive, is under some circumstances the most idle and empty of social arrangements*"[4]. **"Growth" remains, for Dewey, the ultimate standard for political action**[5].

Dewey's key elements in "My Pedagogic Creed" are relevant for the connection between education and politics. These are the following:

1) Environment: true education comes from the stimulation of the child's mind from the demands of the social situation or of the environment.

2) Experience: this unites people in social participation; thus, learning and the life of the community are renewed.

3) Activity: normally, the educational process should begin with an activity, as individuals naturally learn by doing something.

4) Participation: by participating in a social group, individuals create education. In John Dewey's pertinent viewpoint, civil societies consist of individual groups, not "rugged individuals"[6].

5) Service: for Dewey, the "supreme art" of education should shape human powers and adapt them to social service. Dewey suggested that students could help the United States during World War I by working on farms, thus inculcating upon them the idea that serving their country would not be destructive to human life.

6) Community: by community, Dewey understood schools, families, political parties, and the general public. The job of the educational community is to overcome over-competitive individualism and encourage group participation.

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[3] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927, p. 39.
[4] Ibidem, p. 72-73.
[5] Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, op.cit., pp. 858-862.
[6] Amy Sterling Casil, *John Dewey, the Founder of American Liberalism,* the Rosen Publishing Group, New York, 2006, p. 51.

7) Communication: group participation and cooperation occur through words (the ultimate tool)[7].

8) Character: for Dewey, the key components of a good character are **the love of learning**, **the desire to serve the community**, **good judgment** and **human empathy**.

9) Higher Education: for Dewey, **academic freedom** and teacher training institutions ensure the qualification of teachers in public schools.

10) The Democratic Ideal: in an authentic democracy, decisions are based on shared mutual interest.

11) Democratic Culture: for Dewey, the biggest problem faced by the society of his time (and also by the actual society) is that of the industrialized society relating to human culture; accordingly, **education is a certain method to improve culture and democracy**. By teacher training, Dewey understood continuing teacher education and research, which are not possible without a significant degree of teachers' autonomy. Dewey truly believed that education can help students realize that school is another version of society, thus determining them to participate in it as adults[8].

Deweyan democracy meant a lot more than people's election for the government; democracies could also behave abominably (for e.g.: the way the United States of America have treated the South minorities). His theory of democracy was based on the idea that a government should not ensure the well-being of some citizens over others; instead, governmental laws and administration should value the interests and happiness of all its citizens on the same level. Dewey's ideas were always linked together: all responsible citizens should be well-educated, because education is a key to developing a properly fair and functional democratic government. **A fully democratic educational system is the only guarantee against not only present but also future misgovernment**. The function of the schools is to examine the problems shared by all society members, and to strive to conquer the social inequities. Thus, graduates would be able to consider the needs of society as well as common individuals. John Dewey's observation made in *Democracy and Education - "To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness"* - applies to politics, psychology, and education. Although

[7] Ibidem, p. 52.
[8] Ibidem, p. 53.

he retired from Columbia University in 1930, Dewey never withdrew from public life[9].

According to Dr. Gordon Ziniewicz in his *Essays on the Philosophy of John Dewey, "both Dewey and Plato agree that those who govern should be 'enlightened' or educated".* If Plato advanced the idea that only educated, elite people could properly govern others, Dewey was a promoter of the universal possibilities of education and democracy, of the idea that everyone could be educated and could participate in the society, since *"**faith and optimism** are the heart and soul of John Dewey's philosophy"* (Dr. Ziniewicz). Jim Garrison described John Dewey, in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Education,* as *"the man who brought the teachers down among the students".* Dewey believed in liberty, equality, democracy, freedom, equal opportunity and civil rights, and more important, he was able to put his ideas into practice. John Dewey's life and work directly influenced nowadays American educational system and the teacher training and educational methods, thus he remains **America's Philosopher** and **greatest teacher[10]**.

There is a notable resemblance between **John Dewey, America's Philosopher**, and **Mihai Eminescu**, **Romania's National Poet**: both Dewey and Eminescu were idealists concerned with the improvement of the educational systems of their time, and they also activated as political journalists. If Dewey, a radical liberal, published his political views in the New Republic (launched in 1914) where he came in contact with other progressive liberal thinkers, Eminescu wrote for the daily paper *Timpul* (the Time) between 1877 and 1883, which was the official agency of the Conservative Party. Actually, Eminescu was not against liberalism and the liberals, generally-speaking; he opposed those who by thievery, deceit and fraud were disturbing the Romanian social life. **The Romanian public spirit** was distorted not only by **public thievery**, but also by the fact that **public promotion had nothing in common with individual competence and character**. Another important preoccupation for Eminescu – which brings him closer to his American counterpart – was **the Romanian school**. As a school inspector, Eminescu was familiar to detail with the Romanian school system. His pertinent opinion was that, first and foremost, **school** had **the moral obligation to shape characters**, the higher degrees being responsible for the transfer of specialty

[9] Ibidem, p. 61.
[10] Ibidem, pp. 89-93.

knowledge[11]:

"It would be redundant to discuss the thesis that man in his essence is a signally ideal being. What man willingly does, under the impulse of his moral nature, never resembles what he forcedly does, solely for payment or gain. One can easily notice the importance of education in habituating man to willingly perform what is good, equitable and true, without hope of reward or fear of punishment. Learning only as such has nothing in common with ***growth****. Learning by rote all the names of the towns on this globe and all the chemical formulae, all the names of the plant and animal species, all this knowledge mass, however new it would be for an intelligence, it neither makes it more Truth-lover, nor artful to judge and distinguish between right and wrong. Learning consists of the knowledge multitude, culture consists of the knowledge versatileness, and growth consists of neither of these. Growth consists of* ***the continuous influence of the learnt things upon character and discipline of intelligence****. When these two are missing, no matter how much knowledge the mind would have acquired,* ***man experiences a moral emptiness within himself****, which is the most of all, and which leads the undisciplined mind towards the saddest deflections"[12].*

John Dewey's educational and political writings may easily highlight, by comparison, the deficiencies of the current Romanian educational system, choked by a vitiated political life. The Romanian education has been affected and weakened by the current economic crisis, which is, first and foremost, a character crisis, a crisis of the human and moral values, a national identity crisis indicating a deficiency of authentic and positive Romanian models.

Psychiatry Professor Martin Robert Coles of Harvard University has eloquently argued that moral character is enhanced by community-service learning. Professor Coles has proven that community-service learning helps students think about themselves in relation to others, about their neighbors and their obligations to their neighbors. Community-service connects thought and feeling, creating a context in which students can explore how they feel about what they are thinking. In ***The Political Lives of Children***, Professor Coles promotes the idea that children's political lives merge with their moral lives. Children learn politics along with morality, from parents, school, and classmates. Prof. Coles found this to be true not

[11]Translated from http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihai_Eminescu,_jurnalist_politic#Polemica_cu_liberalii. Retrieved 2011-09-09.

[12] Ibidem.

only in the United States, but also everywhere else on the globe. *"**A nation's politics becomes a child's everyday psychology**"*, Coles explains. Children's political thoughts and actions are influenced by the concerns of their environments, but in most cases they struggle with their own moral and political dilemmas. Coles discovered that four-year-olds or five-year-olds have *"intuitive political thinking".* This is also the age when they face with profound ethical questions. Most likely, children don't read Plato or Aristotle, but *"their imaginations are charged by continuing participation in family politics, and their inclination to go from that kind of world to the larger one is no different from Plato's, Aristotle's, Hobbes's, Locke's, Freud's...."* according to Coles. For him, the family is similar to a miniature state, characterized by many of the same moral and political concerns as a nation at large. Coles suggests that nationalism results from the transfer of parental authority to the state. Nationalism is an important means for children to identify with their communities, and with themselves as young citizens. Children use their traditions, legends, and historical experiences of their countries to help forge distinct identities. Professor Coles wrote: *"Nowhere on the five continents I've visited in this study has nationalism failed to become an important element in the developing conscience of young people ... it works its way into just about every corner of the mind's life"*[13].

Dewey gives us numerous examples of how to better the American school system (not only), and how to prepare social progress. Dewey leaves his lasting "legacy" for the academic and pre-academic communities: educators everywhere must actively engage in the complex school-community-university partnership, and assume their moral and civic responsibility to perpetuate human and moral values, to shape characters, to prepare social, economic, political and institutional progress, by uniting their efforts in the attempt to ensure a better and brighter future for the next generations.

In a recent TVR Info talk show entitled "Elevii de azi, cetăţenii de mâine"[14] ("Today's Students, Tomorrow's Citizens"), attended by experts in the educational, psychological and political fields, the following educational issues have been examined:

1. There are student communities in Romania, but they are not active;

[13] http://www.scottlondon.com/articles/coles.html. Retrieved 2011-07-22.

[14] July 2011.

2. Critical thinking is not enough promoted within the Romanian schools, and unfortunately, it is neither learnt at home; school education must go hand-in-hand with home education, because school cannot supply for the education received at home.

3. The civic education courses demand only the study of civic education manuals, visits to the museums, or theatre attendance. Romanian schools do not highlight the importance of shaping civic virtues. American and European schools involve their youth in civic projects, as they are part of the curricular agenda.

4. Romanian students are not very familiar with the volunteer culture. This has been noticed by the various American exchange students (and not only), who are very early involved in volunteer projects.

5. Romanian schools do not emphasize the importance of the debate, the inquiry and analysis of the various social, economic, cultural, religious, educational and political issues; the importance of finding solutions to socio-economic, cultural, religious, educational and political problems. Children are not enough encouraged to debate in schools; without this democratic practice, freedom of expression becomes hindered. Romanian teachers display information without debate, which obviously does not stimulate the pupils'/students' critical spirit.

6. A worrying aspect of the Romanian educational system is that the Romanian youth have become nostalgic about communism. The meaning of communism is discussed at a very innocent level in schools, without varieties; this practice has become counterproductive.

7. Romanian schools do not emphasize the necessity of shaping moral characters. Competition is promoted a lot more than cooperation.

The present doctoral thesis is an endeavor to highlight the relevance of the Deweyan educational-political philosophy within the current American, European, international, and implicitly Romanian context. Three major points conclude this doctoral research:

I. John Dewey's educational-political philosophy is relevant for the volunteer culture not only in America but also in many other countries, more or less democratic, or with a democracy in transition, such as Romania. Understanding Dewey's life and writings about democracy and education remains relevant today, as the global society strives for a civic-oriented society. For the time being, there are no

active student communities in Romania, such as the American ones (for e.g. Public Achievement (PA), Youth-in-Government (YIG), Youth Science Center (YSC), etc.). In order to reinforce the Romanian educational system, the emphasis should fall too on civic education and youth civic engagement at curricular level.

II. The idea of a Laboratory School – John Dewey's innovation – has not been experienced in the same Deweyan manner. Dewey's Laboratory School is essential for the development of critical thinking in the educational process, and should be regarded as a public necessity for innovation. Dewey envisaged his school as a laboratory for testing and verifying new educational theories and principles. Experimental schools connected with theoretical instruction in universities have always been needed. Dewey's school is a model to guide prospective educators. Since the Romanian school system has had certain difficulties in the development of critical thinking, the idea of a laboratory school should be implemented as well at the pre-academic and higher education levels. The notion of **experimental pedagogy** is too little put into practice (if not by no means) in the Romanian universities.

The ideas generated from the Laboratory School are approved educational practices, resulting in effective learning. Regrettably, Dewey's practices cannot be found in schools, not the way that Dewey had in mind. Educators talk a lot about problem-solving, but many talk of higher-order thinking skills, separating certain skills and mastering them apart from their real-world context. Still, children may be doing the real thing, the whole act of problem-solving, in the school. Only the teachers and other professionals in the school can know, and it is they who can make a difference where the lessons from Dewey's school are concerned. Dewey's conditions for a school are[15]:

1. It is organized as a social community; children are learning in the active setting of a miniature community.
2. There is a developmental curriculum, beginning in kindergarten with children's natural interests and abilities.
3. The curriculum has two dimensions: the child's side (activities) and the teacher's side (facts and generalizations in the major fields of knowledge).
4. The teachers are specialists in their subject fields.
5. The social significance of subject matter is brought out in instruction.

[15] Laurel N. Tanner, *Dewey's Laboratory School, Lessons for Today*, Columbia University, 1997, pp. 176-177.

6. Children have hands-on experiences in the manual arts.

7. Children are engaged in solving real problems, past and present. The subjects in the curriculum are integrated in the way that they work and are synthesized in the real world.

8. There is a powerful organizing vertical theme.

9. Curriculum thought is vertical; teachers have a longitudinal view of the curriculum.

10. Teachers work together in planning theme-related activities.

11. Teachers confer/discuss frequently (informally and formally).

12. The school is imbued with a test-and-see (experimental) attitude.

13. The curriculum is continually being developed and plans are modified as new difficulties and potentials are found.

14. There is a close relationship with a university.

15. Classes are small enough to give individual attention to each child.

16. The child's attention is self-impelled.

17. Regarding discipline, appropriate behavior is determined by the nature of the work to be done.

18. In the case of individual discipline problems, the child is redirected into a different activity with the same objective.

19. Younger groups begin the day by reviewing what was accomplished the day before and planning the day's work cooperatively; older children start right in on their independent projects.

20. Children are free to move around in the room and seek help from others.

21. The teacher is viewed by the children as a fellow worker in the activities in progress instead of as an all-powerful ruler.

22. Children are developing habits of cooperation and service to the community.

23. Teachers support the child's aspirations.

24. The school takes advantage of cultural and educational institutions in the community to enrich the curriculum and children's lives. Dewey's idea that there is no lower or higher education, just education, is in operation.

25. The children are happy[16].

The idea of the school as a small cooperative community/society where

[16] Laurel N. Tanner, op.cit., p. 177.

children can solve problems at any stage of development under the wise guidance of their teachers, is extraordinary because it incorporates everything that a democratic society could wish and expect for its children. **Democratic societies need laboratory schools to demonstrate their unlimited possibilities**. The lessons learned from Dewey's Laboratory School should be applied to the children's profit and teachers' delight[17].

III. This doctoral thesis is the first to draw a comparison between John Dewey, America's philosopher, and Mihai Eminescu, Romania's poet: the two great cultural figures (American and Romanian) advanced the idea that **the main role of the school, either American or Romanian, is to shape characters and moral-civic virtues, before forming competences of any type!**

Dewey identified four factors in the improvement of character education[18]:

1) The economic change: *"It is difficult to produce a cooperative type of character in an economic system that lays stress on competition"*[19], Dewey told the Rotarians;

2) Parent education, *"a large element in bringing about better moral education of children and youth"*. Dewey pulled parents' sleeves who din not have the slightest contact with the knowledge of how human nature is developed, parents who were *"totally unaware of the influences that are most powerfully affecting the moral fiber of their children"*[20]. Dewey blamed the American civil society for not having helped parents to cope intelligently with these problems.

3) The provision of recreation for youth: the young are naturally impelled *"toward activity and toward some kind of collective association"*, neither being provided for under the changes in rural life nor changed conditions of urbanization. This also contributed to the poor results in character formation, according to Dewey.

4) The school: *"If I put the school fourth and last, it is not because I regard it as the least important of factors in moral training but because its success is so much*

[17] Ibidem, pp. 176-178.
[18] Ibidem, pp. 174-175.
[19] J. Dewey, "Character Training for Youth", p. 58.
[20] Ibidem.

bound up with the operation of the three others"[21]. Dewey learnt from his own school that **schools need to be organized as communities**. Moral education through discussion is a lot more effective if developing from particular situations in children's experience, instead of focusing on discussing *"virtues and vices in the abstract"*[22]. He explained: "*The more the school is organized as a community in which pupils share, the more opportunity there is for this kind of discussion and the more surely it will lead to the problems of larger social groupings outside the school. Moreover, such organization would give practice in the give and take of social life, practice in methods of cooperation and would require the assumption of definite responsibilities on the part of young people—adapted of course to their age and maturity"*[23].

5) Finally, an aspect not mentioned by Dewey (he was not a Christian practitioner due to the Darwinian influences, although he was formed as an Evangelical), which I would like to mention, is the role of the Christian churches (regardless of confession) in the shaping of human and moral characters. Bridging the dogma differences between confessions, the main role of the Christian churches is a signally social one, these being bound to get involved a lot more at the level of practical solving of the problems whereby the societies served by these churches are confronted. This topic could be reconsidered in a future study.

[21] Ibidem.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] J. Dewey, "Character Training for Youth", pp. 58-59.