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John Dewey's thoughts on ethical mission of schools and suggestions for Vietnamese education today

Abstract. J. Dewey (1859-1952), an American educator, psychologist, and philosopher, had a profound influence on American intellectual life throughout the twentieth century. He not only has research in the field of philosophy, but also delves into social issues, especially the renovation of American schools. He once said that the school must represent the present life, which is really as vivid as the children's life when in the family, where they live or on the playground. Dewey especially appreciates the role of education, considering education as the fundamental method of social progress and reform. Carrying out that role is the moral duty of the school. In the popular view of many Vietnamese and even educational administrators, the school's ethical mission is only to teach ethical subjects, and through other collective activities.

Key words: Educational philosophy, pedagogy, ethical principles, educational methods, education in Vietnam, comprehensive education, John Dewey.

J. Dewey said that education is not a preparation for life, education is life itself. A universal education is the key to teaching people how to break habits and think creatively. He advocates learning by creative action instead of "parrot" learning. Dewey was a strong proponent of the progressive education reform movement. He believes that education should be based on the principle of learning through practice. In addition, for education to carry out the task of social reform, school education is inseparable from the moral task. Dewey left for posterity many valuable works in the field of education, including the main works such as: *Democracy and education*; *Experience and education*; *The School and Society* (*The School and Society*); *Ethical principles in education*...

The work *Moral principles in education*, first published in 1909, is one of the books expressing the spirit of educational reform, and also a book that clearly shows his thoughts about the ethical mission of the school.

1. What is the ethical mission of the school?

According to Dewey, schools have a very important role for social development "to some extent, with characteristics like the state that other institutions without schools have the ability to change the social order." society" [1, p. 17-18]. In the political system, it is done in that it is the right of each individual to contribute to the formulation of social policy, through the vote to decide on political issues. Accordingly, education is first a general job, then a professional profession. One of the important tasks of the school is to carry out the ethical task, contributing to the formation of individuals with enough bravery and qualities to later contribute their voices in the construction and development of society. To understand the ethical mission of the school, Dewey elucidates the concepts of "moral idea" and "idea of morality". Accordingly "ethical ideas" are ideas about anything that works in behavior and cultivates it, making it better in some other way" and "ideas of morality" can

be moral indifference, depravity, or morality” [1, p. 27].

The difference between the "idea of morality" and the "idea of moralism" shows us the frequent misunderstandings between school teachers and critics of education outside the school. One can skim through the curriculum and not find anywhere asking for code of conduct or "ethical teaching." And they think that schools do nothing in character training, they criticize harshly even harshly, about the moral lack of education. According to Dewey, the moral mission of schools is not just to teach directly about moral lessons, but to influence the shaping of children's character, that is, to "widen the scope of indirect and vicarious education, character development through all the institutions, media and materials of school life" [1, p. 31].

Thus, the moral duty of the school is helping students to form moral ideas is the driving force to guide students' behavior in social relations through educational activities of the school. Dewey asserts: "The job of the teacher – parent or teacher – is to make sure that the greatest amount of ideas possible in children and young people is gathered in such a way that They become dynamic ideas, the driving force in the direction of behavior" [1, p. 28]. According to Dewey, this requirement and this opportunity create a universal ethical goal that governs all teaching—any subject. This moral goal is the ultimate goal of the whole education which is to shape the personality of the individual.

Stemming from the notion that there cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for school life and the other for outside life, Dewey asserts: "Ethical responsibility of schools, and of those who regulate them doing it is a responsibility to society" [1, p. 36]. School is essentially a social institution built to do a special job – to perform a specific function to sustain life and promote social progress. An educational system that does not accept moral responsibility on its shoulders is an abandoned and error-prone system.

According to the traditional view, the moral education and value of the public

school system as a whole are measured by its social value. Traditional school social work is often limited to the training of civic duties in a narrow sense, such as the capacity to use the ballot, the propensity to comply with legislation, etc. Dewey argues that, in this way, it does not effectively bind the school's moral responsibility. This approach is one-sided, leading to the separation between the school's moral education goals and the society as a whole. The child is an organized whole, intellectually, socially, morally and physically. We must regard the child as a member of society in the broadest sense [1, p. 37]. We cannot separate the formal citizenship relationship from the whole system of relations with which it actually intertwines. The child is not only the person who has the right to vote and is the subject of the law, they will also be a member of a family, responsible for the upbringing and training of the children themselves. The child will be a worker, busy with something meaningful to society and still maintaining independence and personal dignity. That child will be a member of a certain village or community and must contribute to the values of life. These are obvious and formal, which correctly says for the child "to place him in relation to these various tasks means training in science, in the arts and history; [1, p. 38]. Social circumstances change from year to year, so it is completely impossible to educate a child about any constant situation in life. Consciously or not, on this basis the future citizen cannot meet the requirements in life, making them an independent person or having very little influence on the movement forward. Therefore, "the school's moral responsibility in terms of society must be clarified in the most open and freest spirit; it's like training a child will give him the authority to take charge of himself; not only adapt to the changes that are taking place, but also have the ability to shape and govern them." [1, p. 40]. That is to say, the purpose and moral goal of the school is to participate in social life. If we limit ourselves to the school as an isolated institution, we have no guiding principles, because we have no goals.

Traditional schools often set the goal of comprehensive education for students, according to Dewey, if the educational goal is the harmonious development of the individual's abilities, it is clear that there is no connection here with social life or membership. According to Dewey, "competence is an ability that concerns only the uses to which it is bound and the tasks to which it fulfills" [1, p. 41], if we ignore the applications that social life brings, we have nothing but the "psychology of talent". It is only when we interpret school activities in relation to the broader range of social activities to which they are actually linked that we find a benchmark for judging its moral significance. The school itself must be an important social institution on a much larger scale than it is. The only way to prepare for social life is to participate in it. The way of moral education in traditional schools is in fact just educating the duties that students need to perform and that is only a duty in school, not a duty in social life.

Thus, from the notion that the moral responsibility of the school is a responsibility to the society, according to Dewey, the school's ethical mission does not stop at the lectures on moral theory but on the impact on the society of the whole school's activities in shaping and developing children's personalities and helping them shape moral ideas as driving forces for children's behavior in social relationships. The scope of the school's moral education is understood in a broad sense and indirectly through all the institutions, means and documents of school life.

2. Ethical training for students from the method and content of the curriculum

From the principled explanations of the school's sociality as a basic element in moral education above, according to Dewey, the school's moral mission is to train students in morality from their own perspective of the entire curriculum.

Ethical training from teaching methods is explained by him not from details but in the general spirit. Accordingly, with the traditional teaching method, all students learn the same curriculum, prepare the same lesson, and so "there is no chance for each child to do

something special on their own to be able to play a role in the future to contribute to the common stock, while...involved in the productive work of others" [1, p. 52]. In that condition, the purely personal method is worn out by lack of use. The child is born with an innate desire to be expressed, to work, and to serve. When this tendency is not fostered, the accumulation of antisocial influence is far greater than any of us might think about it. Traditional teaching methods, which make students passively acquire knowledge, and compete for external status, are further adversely affected by their frequent emphasis on preparation for the distant future. This can lead to a loss of moral energy arising from the impression that there is nothing essentially worth doing but preparation for something else, for some distant grave goal. Moreover, setting goals from afar will stimulate selfish desires to go ahead and get ahead of others [2, p. 96].

According to Dewey, in education, students must step away from relevant extrinsic motivation, toward an assessment, for its own sake, of the social value of individual things done by students, because of its broader relationship with life and the method of education must "engage the child's capacity for activity, with its capacities for construction, production and creation, marking an opportunity to shift the moral focus from selfish absorption to bringing social service" [1, p. 57]. He emphasized the experimental education method, the educational method tested by reality, through which learners accumulate and reconstruct personal experience in order to deepen its social content.

In addition to the educational method, moral education is also included in the school's educational program. The educational program determines both the general atmosphere of the school and the educational method. "The curriculum becomes a matter of comprehensive importance for us to know how to apply social standards of ethical values to school work" [1, p. 61]. A learning program must adapt to social developments with methods that engage consensus and co-

operation rather than absorption, exclusivity, and competition.

According to Dewey, we have three independent values built in education: culture, information and mind training. In fact, these are the three stages of social understanding. The information is authentic and educational in so far as it presents clear images and concepts of the material placed within the context of social life. Mind training has a real educational effect only when it represents a response to information about individual talents so that they are controlled by social norms. Culture if it is really educational will be a combination of information and brain training. It marks the socialization of individuals in their outlook on life [1, p. 62]. In schools, each subject is seen as a means of making the child aware of the social context of activity. In fact, at the time of the first study there was no delineation in the range of categorical facts which were scientific, historical or geographical in a predetermined order. This means that at the beginning of the birth of human knowledge of nature, society did not have a division between those areas of knowledge. The classification of each scientific field in relation to the purpose or process of typical social life has some great influence. "We have different interests or purposes, that we categorize documents and mark which parts are scientific, which are historical [1, p. 63]. Here, social criteria are needed to distinguish fields of research and to understand the rationale of each study, i.e. the motives involved. According to Dewey, the natural and social sciences themselves are social in nature. For example, the field of geography is divided into four forms: mathematical geography, physical geography, political geography, and commercial geography. All "the four geomorphological formations mentioned above point to four stages of increasing abstraction in the discussion of the interrelationship of human and natural life" [1, p. 65]. According to Dewey, the field of natural geography itself is not merely about natural conditions, but the basic meaning of lakes, rivers, mountains and plains is social, that changes and defines

guide human relationships. This obviously implies an extension of commercial terminology. It is not merely business-related but is concerned with anything related to human interaction and communication when acted upon by natural forms and characteristics, etc.

In particular, Dewey mentions in the field of history teaching, "history is vital or useless to the child depending on how it is presented from a sociological point of view" [1, p. 67]. If history is considered simply as a record of past events, it is certainly mechanical because the past is so long ago that in the past people had no incentive to participate in it. The moral value of history teaching will be measured by the extent to which past events are created as means of present knowledge—allowing insight into the past, Dewey stresses. What constitutes the structure and functioning of society today? [1, p. 67]. According to Dewey, the existing social structure is too complex and in fact it is difficult for the child to approach it holistically. In this condition, the very selection of exemplary periods of historical development would be like, through a telescope, seeing the essential components of the existing social order. And for the teaching of history to be truly effective, it should not stop at forcing students to collect information to be reduced to almost crippling events, but rather treat the past as it is. The present is intended for the future with some elements of it being extended. And more importantly, when studying past periods, it is important to stick to striking differences. This approach is considered by Dewey to apply the principle of contrast in teaching. That gives the child an imaginary space, free yourself from the pressures of your surroundings and recognize them. The study of history can reveal the main means in the discoveries, inventions, lifestyles, etc. that started the great periods of social progress; and it helps the child to know the main paths of that progress, the main obstacles on the way to development. It helps students understand that, to the extent that social forces themselves are always the same, influences thousands of years ago are also at work in today's society. As such, eve-

Everything depends on history which is viewed from a social point of view and it helps the child to know the main paths of that progress, the main obstacles on the way to development. It helps students understand that, to the extent that social forces themselves are always the same, influences thousands of years ago are also at work in today's society. As such, everything depends on history which is viewed from a social point of view and it helps the child to know the main paths of that progress, the main obstacles on the way to development. It helps students understand that, to the extent that social forces themselves are always the same, influences thousands of years ago are also at work in today's society. As such, everything depends on history which is viewed from a social point of view.

Another example Dewey gives is math. According to him, the discipline achieves or fails to achieve its full purpose depending on how it is presented as a social instrument. If the study of mathematics were separated from where it operates in relation to its use in social life, it would become too difficult to understand, even from the purely intellectual aspect. Mathematics would be meaningless to make numbers an end in themselves rather than a means to a social end. "Let the child be conscious of how numbers are used, of what numbers really represent" [1, p. 72]. According to Dewey, mathematics is essentially sociology in its own right. From the specific comments in the study of the above subjects, Dewey once again asserted: "when a study is taught as a way of understanding social life, it has positive ethical implications" [1, p. 72].

According to Dewey, there are three ethical issues in schools that need attention: "social literacy, social competence and social benefits" [1, p. 75].

Thus, according to Dewey, as a social institution, the school needs to be built on an ethical foundation. The ethical responsibility of the school is its responsibility to society, and so fulfill that responsibility not only through moral teaching but through teaching methods and programs and "To the extent that the school learning represents, in its own spir-

it, authentic community life; to the extent that what is called school discipline, government, order, etc., are manifestations of this inherent social spirit; to the extent that the methods used appeal to real talents and are constructive, allowing the child to manifest and serve; to the extent that the curriculum is selected and organized to provide material to help the child acquire a social sense of the world in which he must play a role, and the requirements to be met; to the extent these purposes are satisfied, the school is organized on an ethical basis. And, to the extent that general principles are taken into account, basic ethical requirements will be met" [1, p. 76]. Those are ethical principles in the spirit of general education, the remaining work "still remains between the individual teacher and the individual child". This concerns the psychological aspect of moral education.

Our moral principles need to be expressed in psychological language because "the child provides us with the best means or tools for understanding moral ideas" [1, p. 80]. Dewey argues that curriculum topics, however important, are carefully chosen without ethical content if not translated into the language of individual activities, habits and desires.

According to Dewey the above are ethical standards and against which the school's mission is to be compared with what the school does for individuals. Schools can only be considered as fulfilling their moral duties when they consider instincts and spontaneous impulses to play a significant role; provide enough opportunity for these qualities to confirm their existence and develop their own results; linking schools as they are today with positive building capacity rather than with absorption and learning methods. Along with that, does the school create the necessary conditions for the formation of good judgment or not. If you just stop at acquiring knowledge, you can never develop judgment. Test your judgment only when the acquired knowledge is put to use [1, p. 88]. That means learning must go with practice, schools must create conditions for students to choose for themselves, try to put those choices into practice.

Only in this way can students learn to distinguish what promises success from what can lead to failure; only then can students form the habit of linking their purposes and ideas to their validating conditions.

From the above ethical principles, according to Dewey, what we need in education is a genuine belief in the existence of ethical principles and can be effectively applied. Ethical principles are not "a priori", not arbitrary "we need to transform morality into the conditions and forces of public life, into individual impulses and habits" [1, p. 91]. If we firmly believe in that, we will certainly reap benefits from the education system. And a teacher who works in confidence will find that every topic, every method of teaching, every surprise in school life engenders moral potential.

3. Some hints in Dewey's conception of Vietnamese education today

We are living in the 21st century, in the context of the stormy development of scientific and technological achievements. With the help of technology devices, with the click of a button, we can find a wealth of information; along with endless storage possibilities that previously took a lot of time and effort to obtain. "With the push of a hand-held remote, you are out into the outside world, without a single step: friends, movies, television, and the global store of knowledge on the Internet are like a treasure trove of forty open robbers appeared in front of Ali Baba" [3, p. 195]. Inventions are increasing day by day to make our lives more comfortable. The world we live in will be part of the cloud, the high-tech cloud that covers us. Instead of having to face-to-face with neighbors, friends, salespeople or ticket collectors, we will be communicating through the media with the help of information that can be found easily. The development of technology is driving the advancement of society. The engine that drives progress globally is the need to exploit economies and markets. The economy needs "smart" manufacturers to meet the needs of development and competition in the global

context. In the future, we cannot predict which new professions will appear.

Along with the strong development of science and technology, the world also has many drastic changes. From extreme climate changes, pollution, depletion of environmental resources, raging epidemics to unpredictable political and military fluctuations, there is a requirement to equip future generations with the ability to high adaptability to all changes of the times and responsibility of "global citizenship".

Practice shows that the current education system not only prepares a direction for our children to enter a career. Educational administrators cannot rely solely on forecasts to establish baseline standards and values.

Another aspect that is also receiving the attention of the whole social community is the moral alienation in society, which requires the education system to strengthen and equip future generations with the cultural foundation and life skills and ethical values to be able to become responsible citizens to their communities and individuals.

Thus, entering the 21st century, it poses problems that require fundamental reform in education, which is not only for Vietnam but also for the whole world. In order to innovate education, in addition to the conditions of material equipment, school administrators, and teachers, an educational philosophy is indispensable. Many views suggest that we lack educational philosophy. Recently, Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam affirmed that Vietnam has an educational philosophy. And the educational philosophy of Vietnam is the philosophy of building a country with rich people, strong country, democracy, justice and civilization; building a comprehensive Vietnamese person, with moral wisdom and beauty, with a national spirit, patriotism and international responsibility. The Deputy Prime Minister also emphasized, our educational philosophy is not built into classical theories and the problem of Vietnamese education is not in the educational philosophy but in the implementation stage. However, that philosophy also needs to be perfected and

supplemented to suit the current international integration practice. At the same time, in order to implement the educational philosophy, it is first necessary to understand correctly and take appropriate implementation measures.

Dewey's educational philosophy had a profound influence throughout the United States and Europe in the twentieth century and remains relevant today because it is a close connection between theory and practice. Dewey and his colleagues built an experimental school at the University of Chicago, led by him as president, to give them the opportunity to experience, observe, and draw on their educational experiences. That shows, the quintessence drawn from his philosophy have universal values with education in general. We want to perfect the philosophy of education, it is necessary to absorb the quintessence of educational philosophy in the world. From Dewey's thought on education in general and on the ethical mission of the school, the following suggestions can be drawn for Vietnamese education in the current context:

Firstly, affirming the role of the school is different from other social institutions in that, the school has the ability to change the social order and education is a common job of the whole society, then a professional career subject. Therefore, investing in education and fundamentally renovating education is an urgent requirement that requires the attention of the whole society.

Secondly, the school as a social institution cannot be separated from practical activities and knowledge cannot be imposed from the outside. Schools must provide students with the opportunity to practice their knowledge and realize its value. This is probably a weakness of Vietnamese education, learning has not been coupled with practice. Students almost learn vegetarian without having the opportunity to practice to test their knowledge and not have the opportunity to realize that practice not only has a good answer as learned in theory, but also has a bad and contradictory side to what is taught.

Thirdly, no one knows for sure what will happen in the future, so in general, the

problem is not what we teach students at school, but more importantly, help them have the ability to self-study and learn what they need. How to help children learn to learn and set goals for themselves.

Fourthly, the social situation is always changing, the school's education needs to direct students to self-mastery so that they can take responsibility for themselves, not only adapting to what is happening but also being able to shape their own lives, dominate them; help children stand up and be of value to something in the real conflicts of life.

Fifthly, we aim to comprehensively educate students, but the problem is to use those competencies in social life, that is, through school activities related to social activities. It is necessary to shift the ethical focus from selfish absorption to social service.

Sixthly, the ethical mission of the school is realized through the educational methods and programs themselves. Teaching should not stop at the goal of imparting available knowledge, but each subject, both natural or social science, must be taught as a way of understanding social life to have a positive virtue.

Seventhly, the role of the teacher as an "artist" who paints the souls and futures of people. The teacher must promote passion and love for the subject. To do so, the content of the curriculum must be conveyed in psychological language, in accordance with individual activities and desires, that is, in accordance with the learners' experiences. That requires the teacher to understand his students and the teacher himself needs to have a wealth of personal experience with the subject and school activities.

Conclusion: Dewey's conception of the school's moral duty has helped us to clearly define the school's moral responsibility as its responsibility to society. Therefore, the school cannot be a closed institution but must be placed in relation to society. There cannot be two sets of ethics books, one set of school ethics books and one set of social ethics books. The goal of the school is to help develop the character of the students so that they will later become responsible citizens of the

national and international community, but still retain their individual independence in social relations. The school's ethical mission needs to be understood in a broad sense, not only in ethical lectures but also in the entire educa-

tional program, teaching methods and other school activities. Dewey's point of view helps us draw some valuable suggestions for the current fundamental reform of Vietnam's education.

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