

John Dewey. Landmarks in the Romanian culture

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Abstract

This text marks the history of an admirable encounter, the one between Romanian pedagogy and John Dewey's work (1859-1952). The author intention is to engender a brief review of the translations, studies and volumes rendered into Romanian language (until 1992). It portrays and interprets some fundamental writings of the pragmatic philosophy and progressive pedagogy to which the pre-eminent representative is the American thinker John Dewey. Furthermore, this article brings back some of the "effects" in school practice.

Keywords: John Dewey; translations; critical analyses; educational innovation; educational alternatives; progressive pedagogy

1. Introduction

No matter how great a people is, it cannot live within its own boundaries. This would be the equivalent of an imprisonment which can be prolonged toward solitude. In the end, we all have full membership in a large community, the one of people all over the world. It is no coincidence that one of Maria Montessori's dreams was to create a "unique nation", to which we all belong by right. In other words, to really live, to live as a free people, means to live in a full engagement with the entire culture of the world. Just so we have the chance to free ourselves of latencies, to be "invaded" by "seeds" and new germination, and to become accomplices to the élan of the entire humankind.

The famous Arab Scholar Ibn Arabi was convinced that "the universe is a single book", a book which is continuously writing itself, a book with no beginning and no end. Perhaps unveiling something of the sense of Ibn Arabi, we may assert, as readers, that our ambition is natural to read as much as possible, definitely this exceeds the national "prose". Only in this way we find new openings, of which ontic value will open for us the windows of a new and more comprehensive world, and at the same time a path toward it. Not coincidentally, Martin Buber spoke to us about the force relationship I-Thou, that puts us in the situation of "being contemplate and to contemplate, to know and being known, to love and being loved". Buber proclaims "in the beginning is the relationship". This way we reach a "middle realm", which exalts you and the other one, a realm that enriches everyone of us.

It is easy to notice that the major national figures are universal notables as well: Shakespeare for the English, Goethe for Germans, Petöfi for Hungarians, Eminescu for Romanians etc. In 1990 Life magazine thought of John Dewey, as one of the one hundred most influential Americans of the 20th century ("the 100 most important Americans of the 20th century"), and certainly has this status. For example, we quote two characterizations: "John Dewey is to be classed among those who have made philosophic thought relevant to the needs of their own day. In the performance of this function he is to be classed with the ancient stoics, with Augustine, with Aquinas, with Francis Bacon, with Descartes, with Locke, with Auguste Comte." (Alfred North

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Whitehead); “We think of John Dewey as the most profound and understanding thinker on education that the world has yet known. He has no equal but Plato” (Ernest C. Moore).

2. Dewey in Romanian language: a translations map

The great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga wrote somewhere that a people is characterized by the translations it carries out. In other words, we always have to decide between options, we are always at the crossroads, plainly said, we have to choose between a founder Tao or a path that leads nowhere. Inevitably, a translation also conveys valuable knowledge from one culture to another. Even the etymology of the term expresses this, because Latin *traduco* means "to move from one place to another".

Dewey's work is brought into Romanian culture through translations. Therefore, the Romanian culture has the privilege to embed in its "sky" a true "star" of philosophy and pedagogy. Dewey too could proudly say that the title *Ich bin ein Stern* of Hermann Hesse's poetry, labels him entirely. Actually, along with the translations of John Dewey's works, Romanian pedagogic thinking – beyond the fact that it interacts with a written work which generates a cultural paradigm – it is getting closer to the fundamentals of some of the most important and modern movements, for instance the pragmatism in philosophy, or progressivism in pedagogy. New twigs on the old trunk of heritage. We review some significant achievements.

Școala și copilul (The School and the Child, 1906) appears into Romanian language, translated by I. G. Marinescu the Director of the Normal School "Charles I." Rendered from French (*L'école et l'enfant*, translation by L.S. Pidoux), the volume brings together four studies: *Interesul și efortul* (Interest and Effort in Education), *Copilul și programele de studii* (The Child and the Curriculum), *Scopul istoriei în învățământul primar* (The Purpose of History in Primary Education), *Morala și educația* (Moral Principles in Education). With all its limitations, because the French translator was rewriting the text in a personal manner, making it sometimes almost unrecognizable in relation to the original work, the translation had been a success, therefore three editions were brought out (see John Dewey, f.d-a). However, it should be mentioned that sometimes the translator did not find the most suitable equivalences (e.g., "struggle" instead of "effort") (see John Dewey, f.d.).

Pedagogia sociala (Social Pedagogy), translation by C.V. Buțureanu adapted from the French version (1919) (see John Dewey, 1919).

Crezul meu pedagogic (My Pedagogic Creed, 1897) has several releases. The first is due to I.Gr. Șerban in 1937 (see I.Gr. Șerban, 1937, pp. 173-185), the subsequent translation is attributed to Nicolae Crețu in 1940 (see N. Crețu., 1940, pp. 237-248). These publications are followed by the rendering of Nicolae I. Bibiri. and Maria N. Bibiri in 1942 (see N. I. Bibiri, M. N. Bibiri, 1942, pp. 15-29). Over the years, in 1971, the text can be found in *The Anthology of American Contemporary Pedagogy* by Ion G. Stanciu, Viorel Nicolescu, Nicolae Sacaliș (see I. G. Stanciu, N. Sacaliș, V. Nicolescu, 1971, pp. 86-97). The latest translations of this series have as source the French text of Ou Tsuin-Chen – Professor at the University of Paris – *La doctrine pédagogique* by John Dewey, 1931 (see Ou Tsuin-Chen, 1931, pp. 255-272). Finally, *My pedagogic Creed*, this time translated from English by Viorel Nicolescu, is found in the anthology *John Dewey- Foundations for a Science of Education* (1992) (see John Dewey, 1992, pp. 46-55).

Text-manifest with a broad resonance in the reconstruction of pedagogy from the progressivist perspective, *My Pedagogic Creed*, in those five articles contained within (1. What is Education? 2. What is School? 3. The Subject-matters for Education, 4. The Nature of Method, 5. The School and Social Progress) gives genuine answers to the major themes of pedagogy.

Scolile de maine (Schools of Tomorrow) (featuring Evelyn Dewey, one of his daughters, 1889-1965) materializes in a translation by G. I. Simeon, general inspector for primary education. He had translated from W. James (*Psychology and Education*) and Ed. A. Kirkpatrick (*Fundamentals of Child Study*). Reviewing the various

renewed models of education, that reflects the essence of the new education, Dewey points out that the school actual function lies in the "preparing children for tomorrow." There is a "strong connection between education and democracy". "Children in school must be allowed freedom so that they will know what its use means when they become the controlling body, and they must be allowed to develop active qualities of initiative, independence, and resourcefulness, before the abuse and failures of democracy will disappear" (John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, f. d., p. 252).

Spre o societate mondiala (Towards a Global Society), translation by Florian Nicolau (1946) (see John Dewey, 1946).

Democratie si educatie. O introducere in filosofia educatiei (Democracy and Education. An introduction to the philosophy of education, 1916, translation by Rodica Moşinschi and issued in the Collected Works titled "Fundamental Texts in Pedagogy" in 1972. The composition encompasses an introductory study, a timeline, notes and reviews by Nicolae Sacaliş and Viorel Nicolescu (see John Dewey, 1972).

We make no error if we say that this is magna opera in John Dewey's pedagogy. The book attracts through limpid ideas, clarity of argument; form and content altogether create a true captatio which enchants the reader. All major topics of pedagogy are brilliantly approached here. The book's title advocates for an education that aims development, growth, constant progress. Dewey opposes this type of education to the one anticipated by Plato, who, in Republica, suggests an instruction that takes into account stability, and trust in an ideal, perfect and immutable state.

Trei scrieri despre educație (Three Writings on Education), title inspired by a famous book of Fichte, brings together three major pedagogical works of John Dewey: The Child and the Curriculum, 1902, The School and Society 1900 and Experience and Education, 1939. The book appears in 1977 with an introductory study, notes and comments, critical bibliography by Viorel Nicolescu; translation by Ioana Herseni, Viorel Nicolescu, Octavian Oprică (see John Dewey, 1977).

Fundamente pentru o știință a educației (Fundamentals for a Science of Education), an anthology to which the selection of texts, translation, introductory study and critical bibliography belong to Viorel Nicolescu (see John Dewey, 1992). The volume brings together a set of fundamental texts, including: My Pedagogic Creed, The Sources of a Science of Education, Moral Principles in Education, Interest and Effort in Education, The Psychology of Effort, The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology etc.

Even though the Romanian translations convey just a relatively small amount of the extensive work of John Dewey (Jo Ann Boydston edition includes 37 volumes that had been released over a period of 25 years, 1965-1990), his writings have utterly fertilized the Romanian pedagogy, triggering new interpretations, new reconstructions, a new pedagogical gnosis. The panel frame of Romanian pedagogy becomes more various not only richer. Pedagogical innovation spreads, alternative pedagogies emerge as a new response to older or recent interrogations. The old dictum that governed the school – magister dixit is permanently replaced with discat a puero magister.

3. Dewey debate: prefaces, studies, books

Along with translations, the research of Dewey's writing intensifies and obviously, a new wave of fresh comments, analyses, monographs etc. arise. All of these have as subject the author and his work – the progressive pedagogy. New values coexist with older ones, or face them. Sometimes originality is nothing but "surreptitious form of imitation" as Stefan Augustin Doinaş says, since the authors conceal their inspiration sources. Nevertheless, what is happening now confirms the veracity stated by Proust that the world was not created just one time, but whenever an original artist appeared. Dewey is definitely included in that category. He becomes a cause of a major effect.

Prefaces, introductory studies that come with translations, all of them must be mentioned in the first place. Some of them go beyond the compulsory "activity" in presenting the author and his work in question, because they are real syntheses of the pedagogy promoted by Dewey or even syntheses of progressive pedagogy. We call to mind the following:

- Prefața traducătorului (Translator's Preface) by G. I. Simeon to the book of Jonh and Ewelyn Dewey – Școalele de mâine/ Schools of To-morrow (see G.I. Simeon, f.d.). Written under the influence of Claparede's introduction to *The School and the Child* titled *John Dewey's Pedagogy* (Ed. Claparede, f.d.), the author subscribes to his point of view. According to Claparede's opinion the fundamental features of Dewey's pedagogy lies in the fact that it is inherited, functional and social. Contrary to the traditional pedagogy – "relying on <passive receptivity> of the child – which moved the center of the school activity sometimes to the teacher, other times to the manual or to the schedule, Dewey's educational system have as axis the child in its entirety, in its specific individuality, with its instincts, aspirations, and interests, giving the physically and morally capacity to its body to fully develop its native strengths" (G. I. Simeon, f.d., p. IX).

- *Pedagogia americană contemporană (Contemporary American Pedagogy)*, introductory study by Ion Gh. Stanciu, Viorel Nicolescu, Nicolae Sacaliș to the *Anthology of American Contemporary Pedagogy* (1971). For a comprehensive image we present the contents of this study: I. Pragmatism- A Specific American Philosophy; II. From Pragmatism to Progressivism; III. Progressivism and Education for Progress; IV. Perennialism and Consistent Values; V. Essentialism and the Cult of Intellectual Education; VI. The Reconstructionism – an Attempt to Escape from Impasse; VII. The Existentialism and the Critical Path in American School: VIII. The Analytical Philosophy and the Path to a Pedagogical Positivism; IX. Comparativism.

- *John Dewey – o perspectivă critic (John Dewey– a Critical Perspective)* by Nicolae Sacaliș and Viorel Nicolescu, introductory study to *Democracy and Education* (see N. Sacaliș, V. Nicolescu, 1972).

"In a world, however, like the one where Dewey lived, in which, every so often the philosophy had witnessed human existence as being at risk and instable, Dewey made great efforts to interpret and understand it as an opportunity." (N. Sacaliș, V. Nicolescu, 1972, p. LIX)

- *John Dewey – Un filosof al experienței (John Dewey– A Philosopher of Experience)*, introductory study by Viorel Nicolescu to Dewey's work *Three Writings about Education* (see Viorel Nicolescu, 1977). We quote the end of the study: "Trying to retain into a slogan the essence of progressive education, as shown in this fruitful study of John Dewey, we adopt the following formula of technical cycle: experience and education, education and action, action and thought and knowledge. And if the pragmatic ontology celebrates among its basic principles the fact that the human being, as an elongation of nature, is coming into being in a gradual and unsettled world, pluralistic, open and infinite, Dewey's pedagogy promotes the idea of an education as a process of experiential growth of the human being which signifies the very reconstructions for development of an open mind for an open universe." (Viorel Nicolescu, 1977, p. 64).

- *Capul lui Janus al interpretării: sinteze și ipoteze privind opera lui John Dewey (Janus Head of Interpretation: Syntheses and Assumptions About John Dewey's Work)*, introductory study by Viorel Nicolescu to the anthology undertaken by him, *Fundamentals for a Science of Education* (1992). In this study, 33 "asserts" try to capture the "core and cover" of Dewey's thinking, this brilliant "chameleon" marked by multiple influences, sometimes incompatible, which accumulates from each one of it, but striving to exceed them, as Dewey himself confesses.

To such studies are added works/chapters of greater or lesser magnitude that have as a core Dewey work's analysis. We bring to mind the following:

- E. Speranția, *Conceptii și perspective din pedagogia actuală*. Ernst Weber, John Dewey, Georg Simmel, Adolphe Ferriere, *Social Pedagogy (Concepts and Perspectives from Current Pedagogy*. Ernst Weber, John Dewey, Georg Simmel, Adolphe Ferriere, *Social Pedagogy*) (1928, 58p.).

From contents: *The Formal Stages of Teaching according to John Dewey* (see E. Speranția, 1928, pp. 11- 16).

- Al. Valeriu, *John Dewey și problema uinteresului (John Dewey and the Interest Problem)* (1932, 27p.).

- Gh. Comicescu, *Realizări și tendințe în școala americană contemporană* (Achievements and Trends in Contemporary American School) (1935, VII+295p.).
- N. Crețu, *John Dewey ca pedagog. Viața și opera sa. Studiu omagial cu prilejul împlinirii vârstei de 80 ani* (John Dewey as an Educator. His Life and Work. A Homage in commemoration of the 80th birthday) (1940, 248p.).
- Steliana Popescu, *John Dewey. Monografie pedagogică* (John Dewey. Monograph Pedagogy) (1940, 247p.).
- Nicolae I. Bibiri, Maria N. Bibiri, *John Dewey și pedagogia contemporană* (John Dewey and Contemporary Pedagogy) (1942, 48p.).

Here, we also mention the article of P. Comarnescu, *Teoriile logice ale lui John Dewey* (Logical Theories of John Dewey), issued in *Jurnal of Philosophy* (1933).

At the same time, plenty of hardworking authors dedicates their efforts to developing works that present ideas and movements of the contemporary pedagogy, particularly of the active school, including C.V. Buțureanu (1920), I. Nisipeanu. (1922), Gr. Tabacaru (1929), Stanciu and Iorgu Stoian (1931), Ilie Sulea-Firu (1942) and others.

With no special research about the PhD theses in pedagogy/educational sciences dedicated to John Dewey, we only mention the title of our paper, developed under the guidance of Prof. Stanciu Stoian in 1980: *John Dewey- Philosopher of the Educational Experience*, whose text, with no political involvement, remains valid even today.

4. John Dewey in school practice

In an inscription dated October 29th, 1978 dedicated to the author of this paper, I.G Șerban writes, among others, on the blank page of his work *The Problem of Education* (1937): "John Dewey's School was my guiding beacon. As much as I could, without ignoring analytical programmes, without disregarding the specificity of the Romanian pupil, I applied John Dewey's theory for more than 40 years. "

We also mention here the School of Experience in Blaj, founded in 1928 and led by Toma Cocișiu. In 1930 this school becomes the School of Experimentation in The Field of Active School. It functioned until 1943, with students from I-VIII grade (today, the School bears founder's name). Among the basic ideas of Cocișiu's pedagogy are included: the use of "centres of life", similar to "centers of interest," applied by John Dewey and Ovide Decroly, Peter Petersen's "theme" or "central ideas" of Felix Klein, designed in conjunction with "soul's needs" and "body's needs" considering the relation between them and the natural environment and social environment. "The centres of life" agglutinate "units of life", and these adhere to the "life issues". Likewise, the School in Blaj emphasized the principles of individual and spontaneous labor, of student own activity (see also Viorel Nicolescu, 2003, pp. 7-8).

Such experiences and initiatives are not the only ones, they just animated the Romanian education in the first half of the 19th century.

The development of the new schools in the Romanian area has led to the advent of methodical works designed to match restructuring ideologies. We only mention here the series of 6 volumes, *Active School*, established by I. Nisipeanu and T. Geanta and dedicated to the processes of some subjects: Religion and the Romanian language, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, History, Aesthetic Education, Geography.

5. A moment of darkness: John Dewey and the communism

The contributions mentioned above demonstrate the active presence of John Dewey into Romanian pedagogy. Even though the fruitage on the Romanian land can be appreciated as being rather minor in comparison to the yield from other countries (see, for example, the work edited by Barbara Levine in 1996, *Works about John Dewey, 1886-1995* that has over 500 pages of bibliography), this has had an extensive influence in both school theory and school practice. And this is what our study tried to reveal.

And maybe this representation would have been more abundant if we take into account the circumstances in which the Communist space, after a period of time when pedagogues such as Zelenko, Satki, or Lunacharsky, and so on have paid attention to Dewey's works, who in 1928 he was invited in the Soviet Union, thanks to Dewey's implication into Trotsky's lawsuit, it leads to the situation of considering Dewey an enemy and, in the old dogmatic tradition thinking, any objective judgment over his work is being banned, everybody allies in denigrating him, standpoints of a detrimental dilettantism arise through the virtual risk within itself and through the propagation of those viewpoints. Such "virtuosos" are always discovered. They were there too, and obviously in Romania as well. We will not name them here, it is not worthy, even if at times they have changed their hair, as the proverb says, but their habit still remained (a leopard never changes its spots). In the blind eyes and the wandered mind of these pseudophilosophers, pragmatism and everything that derives from it is nothing else but a school without value, a sect of "re-action", and Dewey is "a representative of the conciliatory imposture". At the same time, V. I. Lenin and I. V. Stalin are being declared geniuses of philosophy. Instead of old writings, new works thrive now, all of them having a common feature – of vilifying. Authors are being translated (for example Maurice Cornforth or L.A. Șerșenko), "helping" those who study dialectic materialism and historical materialism. The Romanian authors are not better neither. Mihail Ralea himself, with the help of some predecessors to whom he collaborated, Dr. I. Iancu, Tatiana Cazacu and Ursula Șchiopu, published the *Antihuman and Anti-Scientific Nature of the American Bourgeois Psychology* (1954). The title fully "discloses" its content. Nevertheless, after the pleasant walk through the garden, we have no intention to fail among the weeds. Vivat John Dewey!

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Understanding John Dewey as a key author for changing both the concept and practice of education, this paper highlights the project-based learning (Pjbl) as a catalyst for emerging efforts into nowadays Romanian educational system, A short historical overview reveals the importance of American educators's experience. In 1918, Dewey's student William Kilpatrick formalized "The Project Method" and became popular in the Progressive Education movement. In parallel, the use of projects in education blossomed in Europe and Russia. During the 60s and 70s, the project approach lost popularity in the United States (Blumenfeld et al. Contributors: John Dewey. Subjects: Democracy. Culture, Identity and Democracy in the Face of Modernization By Fukuyama, Francis Real Estate Issues, Vol. 31, No. 2, Fall 2006. Read preview Overview. 'Support Local Journalism, It's Good for Democracy' UK Culture Secretary Jeremy Wright on the Future for Journalism and Newspapers By Western Mail (Cardiff, Wales), February 22, 2019. Read preview Overview. Police Academy; U.S. Training Exports democracy.(NATION)(CULTURE, ET CETERA) By Duin, Julia The Washington Times (Washington, DC), September 20, 2002. Audio Books & Poetry Community Audio Computers, Technology and Science Music, Arts & Culture News & Public Affairs Non-English Audio Spirituality & Religion. Librivox Free Audiobook. 3rd & Goal Cal Johnstone Salah Al-Budair Hope Chapel Maui Juice 90 Book and Author Series - BA Series. Human Nature And Conduct. by. John Dewey. Publication date. 1922.