

John Dewey: interest and effort under debate

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ABSTRACT. The intention of this study is to introduce reflections about pedagogical categories “interest” and “effort” that were discussed by the American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), which had a huge repercussion in educational debates in Brazil. Regarding Deweyan thought, it is emphasized that, in Brazilian educational historiography, there is no agreement among his educational and social perspectives. In relation to pedagogical categories, specifically “interest” and “effort”, there is no convergence on their meanings and dispositions in the educational act. Moreover, a bibliographic research was carried out prioritizing the descriptors: “interest”, “effort” and “John Dewey”, which made it possible to select articles, dissertations and theses on the subject. In this part, in a descriptive analysis, the intention was to point out the different readings on such categories. Then, based on the works *Vida e Educação* (1978) and *Democracia e Educação* (1936), the aforementioned categories are discussed based on Dewey’s contributions. Observing this American intellectual in relation to his context, it is noteworthy that he intended to correct the problems of bourgeois democracy through an educational project. Therefore, the pedagogical categories “interest” and “effort” were not understood as stagnant, but interrelated – with each other and with other pedagogical categories –, composing a broad education project that presupposed a planned and teacher-oriented environment. In this way, Dewey aimed to form new reflexive and social habits in individuals, believing that they could develop a more evolved and democratic society.

Keywords: historiography; experimental pedagogy; democratic society.

John Dewey: interesse e esforço em debate

RESUMO. O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar reflexões sobre as categorias pedagógicas “interesse” e “esforço” que foram discutidas pelo filósofo norte-americano John Dewey (1859-1952), que teve grande repercussão nos debates educacionais do Brasil. Sobre o pensamento deweyano, destaca-se que, na historiografia educacional brasileira, não há consenso sobre suas perspectivas educacionais e sociais. No que se referem suas categorias pedagógicas, em específico as de “interesse” e “esforço”, não há concordância sobre seus significados e disposições no ato educativo. Ademais, foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica priorizando os descritores: “interesse”, “esforço” e “John Dewey”, o que possibilitou selecionar artigos, dissertações e teses que versam sobre a temática. Nesta parte, em uma análise descritiva, o propósito foi de pontuar as diferentes leituras sobre tais categorias. Em seguida, com base nos livros *Vida e Educação* (1978) e *Democracia e Educação* (1936), apresentam-se as categorias supracitadas com base nas contribuições de Dewey. Observando ao intelectual estadunidense em relação ao seu contexto, destaca-se que ele buscou corrigir os problemas da democracia burguesa por intermédio de um projeto educacional. Assim, as categorias pedagógicas “interesse” e “esforço” não eram entendidas de forma estanques, mas interrelacionadas – entre si e com outras categorias pedagógicas –, compondo um amplo projeto de educação que pressupunha um ambiente planejado e orientado pelo professor. Desse modo, Dewey almejava formar novos hábitos reflexivos e sociais nos indivíduos, acreditando que assim poder-se-ia constituir uma sociedade mais desenvolvida e democrática.

Palavras-chave: historiografia; pedagogia experimental; sociedade democrática.

John Dewey: interés y esfuerzo en debate

RESUMEN. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar reflexiones sobre las categorías pedagógicas “interés” y “esfuerzo” que fueron discutidas por el filósofo norteamericano John Dewey (1859-1952), que tuvo gran repercusión en los debates educacionales de Brasil. Sobre el pensamiento deweyano, se destaca que, en la historiografía educacional brasileña, no existen consensos sobre sus perspectivas educacionales y sociales. No que se refieren sus categorías pedagógicas, en específico las de “interés” y “esfuerzo”, no se destacan

concordancias sobre sus significados y disposiciones en el ato educativo. Además, fue realizada una investigación bibliográfica priorizando los descriptores: “interés”, “esfuerzo” y “John Dewey”, lo que permitió seleccionar artículos, disertaciones y tesis que versaban sobre la temática. En esta parte, en un análisis descriptivo, el propósito fue de destacar las diferentes lecturas sobre tales categorías. En secuencia, basándose en los libros *Vida e Educação* (1978) y *Democracia e Educação* (1936), se presentan las categorías antedichas con base en las contribuciones de Dewey. Observando al intelectual estadounidense en relación a su contexto, se destaca que él buscó corregir los problemas de la democracia burguesa por intermedio de un proyecto educacional. Así, las categorías pedagógicas “interés” y “esfuerzo” no fueron entendidas de manera estanques, más se interrelacionan – entre sí y con otras categorías pedagógicas –, componiendo un amplio proyecto de educación que presuponía un ambiente planeado y orientado por el profesor. De ese modo, Dewey deseaba formar nuevos hábitos reflexivos y sociales en los individuos, creyendo que así se podría constituir una sociedad más desarrollada y democrática.

Palabras clave: historiografía; pedagogía experimental; sociedad democrática.

Received on January 31, 2022.

Accepted on August 02, 2022.

Introduction¹

"Interest" and "effort" are two pedagogical categories all too often present in educational discussions. Numerous classical educational theorists² have written about them, both to defend and criticize them. In contemporary times, the debate is aflutter in search of an answer to the student's school failure or success. To help reflect on this theoretical dispute, we will use the ideas of John Dewey (1859-1952), an American educator and philosopher who, in his time, perceived the theoretical conflict over these categories and participated intensely in the debate.

Considering that Dewey's perspective is diversely presented by certain contemporary interpreters, many times his pedagogical categories are treated in a disconnected way. Thus, in the first part of this article, through theses, dissertations, and scientific articles available on the Internet or published in books, the interpretations of scholars of the American intellectual who wrote about the categories of interest and effort are discussed. In a descriptive analysis, the goal is to situate the reader about the similarities and contradictions existing in the theoretical debate about such categories. Moreover, considering the divergence of interpretation, the aim is to recover the philosopher's thought, as Dewey's thought is investigated in relation to its context.

In this sense, the second part of this article, through the works written by Dewey, focuses mainly on the book *Vida e Educação* (1978) and *Democracia e Educação* (1936)³, we seek to expose his thought about the categories.

In addition, such analysis is considered important for the theoretical and methodological debate in education and may contribute to the training of teachers regarding the categories of interest and effort in the teaching and learning process, as well as to the understanding of Dewey's theory.

Interest and effort in contemporary education: appropriations of Dewey's theory

Reflecting on the concepts of interest and effort today is important to better understand the other pedagogical categories that permeate the school universe⁴. Thus, in the discussions related to the theme of this article, Dewey stands out with his theory and the proposal to unify interest and effort in education.

However, the philosopher is still little explored when it comes to the study of these categories and their importance for education. During the research, several interpretations of Dewey's theory were found, some in a critical tone and others based on the philosophical thought of the author, but most of them focused on a broad discussion about his conception of education.

Among contemporary scholars who criticize Dewey's perspective, Motta and Urt (2007) are among those who understand that, in the American philosopher's theory, the contents are disregarded by the teacher, since it is through his interests and experiences that the student gets used to learning.

¹ This article is part of the master's research already defended on February 24, 2021, in the Postgraduate Program in Education of the State University of Oeste do Paraná, Cascavel campus, PR.

² Intellectuals include Kant (1724-1804), Herbart (1776-1841), Montessori (1870-1952), Decroly (1871-1932), Claparède (1873-1940), Kilpatrick (1871-1965), Vygotski (1896-1934), Makarenko (1888-1939), and Gramsci (1891-1937). See in Buzin (2021).

³ *Life and Education* (1978) is the 11th Brazilian edition, a book in which Anísio Teixeira organized and translated Dewey's essay *Interest and Effort in education* (1913), together with *The Child and The Curriculum* (1902), for the collection *Biblioteca de Educação*, at Lourenço Filho's request. The work *Democracia e Educação: breve tratado de filosofia de educação* (1936) was the first edition in Brazil translated by Godofredo Rangel and Anísio Teixeira, in the collection *Biblioteca Pedagógica Brasileira*, directed by Fernando de Azevedo, published in the United States in 1916 as *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*.

⁴ Such as the discipline, the subject and the teaching content, the methodologies adopted by the teacher, among others.

Libâneo (2003), when commenting on the teacher's action in Dewey's theory, reports that the teacher's action should be discrete, since "there is no privileged place for the teacher; rather, his role is to assist the child's free and spontaneous development; if he intervenes, it is to shape his reasoning" (Libâneo, 2003, p. 12). From this understanding, the Brazilian researcher states that Dewey does not assign due value to the teacher in teaching since his role is only to monitor and intervene when necessary.

Concerning to Dewey's pedagogical theory, Saviani (2012a) - when defending the assumptions of Critical Historical Pedagogy - also points out criticism to Dewey's teaching proposal, stating that, for the American philosopher, "the teacher should always start from the student's interests, the manifestation of a strong interest [...] would prevail over the logical reasons that justified the previous programming and the objective established for that class" (Saviani, 2012a, p. 3). Thus, the Brazilian intellectual points out the prevalence of the psychological aspects and the emotions of the students and the devaluation of the logical aspects of education; that is, in modern pedagogy, as Saviani calls Dewey's theory, there is an overvaluation of the singular interests of the individual and a secondary consideration of the organization of teaching, the contents, and the objectives. In short, "[...] emotion must precede reason, the psychological aspect imposes itself over the logical, and methods over content" (Saviani, 2012a, p. 03).

While explaining his understanding of the limits of Dewey's theory, Saviani (2012b) also presents the advances of such pedagogy over traditional education. Thus, he highlights that one of the merits of the new school was to denounce "[...] the mechanical, artificial, outdated character of the contents of the traditional school" (Saviani, 2012b, p. 64). In this case, even disagreeing with the psychological emphasis present in Dewey's theory, Saviani recognizes its pedagogical value by denouncing the rigor and mechanical tricks of the traditional school in the teaching of school content.

Jones (1989), in response to authors with a critical view of Dewey's theory, pointed out that there are mistakes in the appropriations of Dewey's thought, such as

- a) a conception of freedom that, appearing as a counterproposal to discipline, degenerated into disorder and chaos;
- b) an idea of interest, appearing as a counterproposal to effort without motivation, diluted by dispersion;
- c) an idea of activity and experience, as opposed to passivity and the abstract without concrete reference, distorted into the trivial and recreational;
- d) an idea of end remodelable by activity, as opposed to the dualism of end-action, distorted by pedagogical practices lacking goals (Jones, 1989, p. 132).⁵

The author also points out that such interpretations were widespread in Brazil, making it necessary to revisit Dewey's theory. In contrast, the author understands that Dewey's theory emerges to add to the struggle for education for all, and for there to be a reflection and conscious participation of individuals in a divided society. Jones (1989, p. 132) states:

We believe that the criticism is, to a great extent, the result of the misuse of active pedagogy, the ignorance of Dewey's proposals and/or misinterpretations of his ideology. Dewey came to us to reinforce a counter-hegemonic movement and in a particularly propitious moment to its extreme and almost uncritical adoption, that is, on the eve of the *Estado Novo* (Jones, 1989, p. 132).⁶

Also, among the authors who appropriate deweyan categories is Muraro (2016), who works with the concepts of interest, effort, and their respective relationships with learning development. In his analysis, he argues that

The growth of interest requires that the process begins on the practical side, since this is the field of perception of cause-and-effect relationships. When a certain end is expected, that is, an interest in the effect, reflection becomes concerned with the conditions of its production, that is, the causes. 'The interest in a final plan reverts into interest in the intermediate steps, creating the conditions for the effort' (Muraro, 2016, p. 39-40, emphasis added).

Thus, in Muraro's (2016) understanding, the interest for the end is what promotes the intermediate interest, that is, by the means that the condition for the individual's spontaneous and voluntary effort is achieved. Regarding interest, in his research, the author highlights that it must continually grow. Therefore, in Dewey's theory, interest must be reflected, because "growth of interest means change guided by the investigative process" (Muraro, 2016, p. 37). In this sense, it is understood that immediate interest should be transformed into mediated interest through the individual's mental activity - permeated by the teacher's pedagogical action - from educational guidance and the necessary conditions for growth.

⁵ Orthography updated.

⁶ Orthography updated.

Participating in the discussions about ambiguity in the interpretation of Dewey's theory, Andrade (2007) states that the categories of interest and effort, as well as Dewey's entire theory, should occur in a dialectical movement, in which the extreme or opposite sides stimulate each other, in search of a "harmonic totality". However, Andrade (2007) contrasts this with criticism, arguing that it is a difficult task in education because

[...] the choice of experiences that mobilize concrete problem situations that can have the force to become a means to the development of a genuine theoretical interest has nothing obvious about it. Perhaps because he could not find in science or in the applications of the scientific method experiences that if image of wholeness, that perception and sense of fullness, Dewey went looking to aesthetics for a relation between matter and form that corresponded to that relation between interest and effort. (Andrade, 2007, p. 30-31).

For the author, not all educational knowledge is amenable to "experimentation," and therefore does not achieve the harmonious totality between extremes that Dewey sought. Another interpretation is found in Schwengber and Schütz (2018), on interest and discipline from Dewey's theory, relating it to the contemporary educational context. The authors emphasize the categories based on the book *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1936), without considering the category of effort as a necessary action for thinking, since it is not highlighted by Dewey in the work.

Also, Schwengber and Schütz (2018) work on the concepts to define intelligent pedagogical action. For the researchers, in the Deweyian theory, it is necessary that, from the pedagogical environment, the teacher provides activities that arouse interest in the student, so that he or she feels a "strong will" to act and participate. From this strong will, as well as from its interaction with interest, the student disciplines himself in search of a goal. Thus, discipline is essential so that, during the activity, there is no withdrawal, but a commitment, since if it is an intelligent action, it will require more time and stamina compared to other activities.

Furthermore, analyzing interest and discipline, Dalbosco (2018) says that Dewey advocated the formation of people's spirit through instruction to "culturally arm" individuals for action and participation in social democracy. Thus, "instruction as social cultivation of the human spirit depends on the formative role of both interest and discipline" (Dalbosco, 2018, p. 54).

Dalbosco (2018) emphasizes that for Dewey, interest and discipline are essential because they are categories that would form subjects capable of mastering their wills and providing individual and social-democratic development. In his words, "[...] both interest and discipline are thought by Dewey from the perspective of pedagogical self-government, aiming at the democratic formation of the human will" (Dalbosco, 2018, p. 61). Thus, with such formation, individuals would be "culturally armed" to overcome authoritarian systems of social life, present in family, religious, educational institutions and/or governments. In this way, the formation of the spirit, based on interest and discipline in Dewey's theory, according to Dalbosco (2018, p. 62), "[...] are exercises in preparing human beings to overcome authoritarian forms of life and turn to solidary and cooperative experiences". Through this statement, it is understood that the educational purpose of Dewey's theory was aimed at the participating formation of the individual for democracy.

Nevertheless, Santos (2013) studied the Deweyian category of interest by relating it to the science curriculum. For the author, the investigative needs of education should be a continuous process, starting from the student's interests to, from the acquired scientific knowledge, ensuring a new process of investigation. Thus, Santos (2013, p. 9) states that, for Dewey,

Student interest was a fundamental component of his educational philosophy, but only one of many conditions for learning. [...]. For Dewey education was a continuous process of inquiry, which originated with real problems of interest to the student, and these, when solved, generated new knowledge useful to guide further inquiry.

Therefore, it can be seen that, although the author mentions the role of interest in education, she does not explore the definition of the category, limiting herself to highlight that it should start from the real problems of the student.

Furthermore, Lourenço Filho and Mendonça (2014) also point out the interest in Dewey's theory, emphasizing its role in the development of the student's autonomy, but they do not mention the effort in this process. For the authors, when considering the student's experiences as an initiative to constitute new experiences, they "[...] engage in learning with more interest and develop their autonomy seeking the answers - of a problem situation presented by the teacher, for example - by their own will" (Lourenço Filho & Mendonça, 2014, p. 195). It is understood, then, that the term "engage" can be replaced by strive, but in the reflective sense, in its continuous relationship with thought. Moreover, it was noted that Lourenço Filho and Mendonça (2014) emphasize the teacher's effort in providing the activities and means necessary for learning, since

This exercise stems from the teacher's effort to build a consistent contextualization, creating opportunities for understanding based on the student's particular experiences, which should be the foundation for the elaboration of their new interpretations and conceptions about the world, together with their freedom of creativity and imagination (Lourenço Filho & Mendonça, 2014, p. 195).

Thus, for Lourenço Filho and Mendonça (2014), in Dewey's theory, the effort should come from the teacher since they do not mention the student's part in the process. It is also observed that the authors' analysis of interest in Dewey is restricted, as in Santos (2013) since the scholars do not present the meaning of interest in the theory of the American philosopher.

Other authors who discuss the category of interest in Dewey's theory are Sass and Liba (2011,): they present both the concept of interest and its definition in Deweyian theory. Consequently, they understand that interest originates from an intrinsic relationship between the individual, the medium and the object, designating in the student recognition of his "self" with the proposed activity, becoming a conscious action. Thus, according to Sass and Liba (2011, p. 40), "[...] one can say that interest is, then, of the sphere of self-consciousness and arising from the relationship of the subject with the object, of the individual with society, of the student with the school". Moreover, the authors interpret that, in Dewey's theory, recognizing such relationships from interest means "[...] to consider the individuality of students in relation to their aptitudes, needs, and preferences, and not to assume that all spirits function in the same way" (Sass & Liba, 2011, p. 40). In the statement, one notices the authors' appropriation of the deweyan criticism related to traditional pedagogy, which did not consider the needs and experiences of the student, seen as a passive being in the process, who acted mechanically and unconsciously.

Bernardino (2009) uses the categories of interest and motivation to approach foreign language teaching in Basic Education, specifically English in public schools. Therefore, the author understands that interest is related to the student's study subjects and experiences, as well as their individuality. For her, "true interest is linked to certain conditions that lead the individual to put all his effort in a certain activity, and it is also linked to the satisfaction that emanates from the subject being aware of his own development" (Bernardino, 2009, p. 5).

In her research, the author does not cite effort as a reflexive activity, but as a complement and consequence of interest, highlighting that the latter instigates the motivation necessary for the student to try and engage in an activity. In this case, Bernardino (2009) overvalues motivation, forgetting that it should be necessary for the student to feel the indispensability of the effort, not for him to accomplish a task because he felt motivated.

Therefore, when highlighting the criticism of Bernardino (2009) on Dewey's theory, it is evident that, for the author, an education based on the student's interest and motivation would be ideal only in a democratic education model, as Dewey aimed, because "it is an ambitious goal for the current context, especially about to public school" (Bernardino, 2009, p. 6). However, the author agrees that an ambitious education like Dewey's is better than an education that disregards the individuality of the student.

Moreover, with to authors who have addressed interest and effort in education in a broad way, Simões (2010) stands out, since it is concerned, in addition to bringing the meaning of the categories, with presenting the history of interest and effort in the conception of several educational theorists, including Dewey. About the understanding of the categories in Dewey's theory, it is observed that the author considers the importance of both. He also discusses the meaning of interest and effort, presenting Dewey's criticism of "traditional" and "new" theories, pointing out that one cannot talk about interest without relating it to the effort, or even the opposite. According to Simões (2010, p. 255), in Dewey, "[...] interest and effort are two phenomena so closely linked that it is very difficult to approach one of them without making it compulsory to refer to the other".

Likewise, the dissertation by Baraldi (2013) also stands out, which understands the categories of interest and effort as undivided. From the concept of democracy, he highlighted that effort is an action of the individual in search of his balance, which is destabilized when faced with a need. Given this, the action of reflected effort provides the individual with a new equilibrium, called, in Baraldi's (2013) understanding, satisfaction. Then, supplying the need becomes an interest:

If there is no interest, there will also be no effort, because a situation of need that requires satisfaction, that is, the re-establishment of continuity with the environment, has not been generated. It doesn't matter what things are, strictly speaking, but what they are for us, in each historical and social context (Baraldi, 2013, p. 51).

Therefore, striving in its pursuit becomes a discipline; satisfaction, when one returns to equilibrium with a new perspective, a new knowledge, becomes a value. Consequently, such value must have a global moral

character, as it is beyond individuality, corresponds to its context, but is directly linked to general social issues. According to Baraldi (2013), the need can be individual or social, since, with the evolution and development of society, new needs have emerged beyond those essential to human survival. Thus, the new needs provide a "reconstruction" in habits and social experiences. Still, in Baraldi's (2013, p. 56) reading of Dewey's theory, "the category 'reconstruction' is implicated in individual efforts to overcome difficulties, as well as in social efforts to solve endemic or pandemic problems".

Moreover, it is from such reconstruction that growth is understood in Dewey, because "the subject encounters a strange reality that forces him to know, and this makes him grow. The human does not stop growing throughout his life, at any age" (Baraldi, 2013, p. 99). In the meantime, with the understanding of changing reality from reconstruction, knowledge, and making those who act in it grow, Accorsi and Teruya (2018) also mention the categories of interest and effort when analyzing the movie *Além da Sala de Aula* considering Dewey's theory.

The authors relate some scenes and the unfolding of the narrative to the Deweyan educational categories. In the film, the teacher, the main character, is faced with very few teaching and learning conditions and a precarious social and economic reality for the students, which results in a process of educational reconstruction. In that context, the teacher tries to get to know the students so that, based on their experiences, she can work in the classroom. Thus, she encourages family help and participation in the school, which is reciprocated and looks for ways to improve the school environment, reforming the school and seeking new pedagogical resources through requests to the politicians of her town. Thus, Accorsi and Teruya (2018) understand, based on Deweyan theory, that the teacher instigated student's interest based on individual experiences and the appropriate environment. Thus, the students met expectations by making the necessary effort to learn and become active in this process. Accorsi and Teruya (2018, p. 22, author's emphasis) conclude that,

We can highlight that the student's role in the construction of knowledge was based on discipline, interest, and effort, concepts discussed by Dewey in the book *Vida e Educação*. When the students discover, through Stacey's mediation, that learning can be pleasurable and, above all, possible, the movie reinforces the idea that students are active in the process of knowledge production and cannot be considered as mere recipients of the truths disseminated in the classroom.

From this analysis, it is observed that the authors allow relevant reflections on the categories of interest and effort, but do not point out the limits of the theory, unlike most Dewey interpreters. On this issue, from a critical perspective of Dewey's theory, Jones (1989) discusses certain limits of both Dewey and the Brazilian Schoolmasters. According to the author, the intellectuals observed the class division, but did not go beyond this thought, transferring to the individual his success or failure. Yet, another gap highlighted by Jones (1989, p. 140) is that Dewey and the Scholasticovists "[...] did not question the prevailing social order itself. They questioned the traditional school but not the traditional bourgeois society". The researcher also points out that, "like Dewey, the renovations 'updated' the capitalist school, but could not revolutionize it because there was no disruption of the structure" (Jones, 1989, p. 140, author's emphasis).

In the wake of authors who have written about interest and effort in Dewey's theory, Mattos (2008) highlights the importance of Deweyan categories for Anísio Teixeira's educational theory in Brazil. To define them, Mattos (2008) argues that interest and effort, for Dewey, are presented as a "synthesis" of the theories that prioritized only interest or only effort in education. Similarly, Carvalho and Guizzo (2016) discuss the two categories from historical analysis, mentioning that, in Dewey, they are inseparable. With the same approaches, we highlight the position of Biasotto (2016, p. 53, author's emphasis), when he states that "interest and effort are sometimes opposed and sometimes complementary. The first is the only guarantee of attention, while the second is the dissociation of the 'I' from the activity. They are two dialectical elements that move an activity".

With similar analyses to the aforementioned, the studies by Rocha (2011), Gotarde (2016), and Marcondes (2017) stand out. In the writings of Rocha (2011), it is noteworthy that the theoretical approach by establishing relationships between the two categories with the principle of continuity. In his thesis, he also considers the role of the teacher as an educational agent who guides the teaching process, since it is possible to verify the importance of interest and effort also on the part of the teacher, based on the deweyan theory. Regarding interest in its psychological aspect, Rocha (2011, p. 125) asserts, based on Dewey, that it should be differentiated according to "[...] the conception of the individual that this teacher has with him or herself"

(Rocha, 2011, p. 125). Moreover, in its social aspect, "[...] the teacher's interest is linked to the conception of society he has. The conception of the human being is essential to determine what is wanted with the individual - in this case, the student - who is under his guidance". Still, the author also discusses the role of the teaching effort, since learning is a crucial part of life, not only for the teacher but for all professions and at any age. Thus, committing to your activity is what will ensure continued growth.

It is worth arguing that, although in Dewey's theory the "will to learn" should come from the student, it is understood that, for the philosopher, the teacher also plays the role of "stimulus" or "example". Consequently, the teacher's interest and effort are essential for the student to identify with learning.

Other researchers cite interest and effort by relating them to other Deweyan terms or categories. Lima (2014), in her dissertation on authority in Dewey and its relations to education, for example, briefly discusses the categories of interest and effort to point out that they are important in the teaching and learning process. Likewise, Souza (2019) addresses the categories when describing the role of the teacher in Dewey's educational theory. Other authors who take a similar approach include Schmidt (2009), Pereira, Martins, Alves, and Delgado (2009), Bin (2012), and Medeiros (2013).

Of the studies consulted, the interpretation of Biasotto and Galter (2016) went beyond the pedagogical aspect of the Deweyan categories of interest and effort, considering the American thinker's conception of society and democratic education from a historical perspective. With a similar approach, Ali (2014) emphasized that deweyan educational training proposed that individuals could share their common interests with different social groups through communication.

Regarding the conception of society in Dewey, Ali (2014, p. 61) states that "to be truly democratic, in no way means politics, it is above all participatory and confident action of shared interests, thus giving the cooperative characteristic between groups". Therefore, it is observed that an education based on the interests of individuals aimed to achieve a common interest that, in a democratic society, would be shared with everyone, forming a participatory democracy, beyond that related to the condition of voting.

In the same analytical horizon, Pizzi (2015, p. 8) states that, for Dewey, "the school would be a powerful instrument of social change, to the extent that it encouraged people's action on social institutions". To this end, education should be based on the child's interest, because with this, he would learn to strive to control his actions, reflecting such attitudes directly in society.

One can see, then, the importance of deweyan educational training based on interest and effort for the constitution of a democratic society. Trindade (2009), resembling the interpretations of Biasotto and Galter (2016), Ali (2014) and Pizzi (2015), related the interest in Dewey to the conception of society and democracy. However, unlike the other studies mentioned, Trindade (2009) did not specifically address effort and remained focused on the category of interest. For the researcher, an education based on the student's interest would also be a condition for a democratic society, as highlighted by Dewey.

Still, on the debate, Galiani (2014) argued that Deweyan theory was the result of a historical context in which there was a range of inequalities. To minimize them, Dewey mediated them through democratic education, guaranteeing the "freedom" advocated by "social morality." According to Galiani (2014, p. 189, author's emphasis),

In this process of mediation, pedagogical methods favor cooperation and solidarity activities and attend to public and collective interests, as opposed to private and individual interests. He believed that, through this mediation, the formation of a democratic feeling would favor social change and contribute to economic stability without causing "disorder". In sum, democracy lived from a rational, philosophical, and scientific point of view, that is, organized, thought out and experienced, and not only driven by will, desire and emotion, would minimize class conflicts and guarantee equality in the distribution of material resources.

Thus, based on Galiani's (2014) understanding, the social role of interest is observed in Dewey's theory, through which people would learn to "reconcile" in their action's social interests with individual or private interests. In such a process, a "democratic feeling" would be created, since individuals would participate in a society based on reasoned, intelligent, and reflected ideas and actions, keeping away from impulses. In this direction, Galiani (2014) understands that divergent social interests would diminish and, as a result, there would be no need for a conflictive revolution between classes due to inequalities, but an educational revolution, which would be enough to soften social and economic differences.

Interest and effort for John Dewey

Among the various contemporary appropriations of Dewey's theory, it is important to present what the philosopher understands as interest and effort. In the book translated by Anísio Teixeira, called *Vida e Educação* (1978), Teixeira enables the Brazilian reader to get to know Dewey's essay, *Interest and Effort in education*, published in 1913.

According to Toledo and Carvalho (2017), the translation and publication of the work in Brazil made it possible for Brazilian teachers of the 1930s to read and understand it. Moreover, the authors point out that textual and typographical operations were constituted to instigate the desire to read other works by the philosopher, especially *Democracia e Educação* (Dewey, 1916), which, in Brazil, had its translation published in 1936.

When Dewey writes about interest and effort, the author is situated in a context of theoretical discussions about education, in a society that lived with the increase in industrial production rates, urbanization, and growth in the quantity and quality of means of transportation and communication. New forms of work were emerging, but also the number of unemployed was increasing, as were migratory movements and the complexity of commercial and international relations. These were factors that, directly and indirectly, influenced the educational debate⁷.

For the philosopher, the form of industrial work, constituted by division and machine routine, was provoking a distancing between the activity and the intelligent action of the individual, as well as between the individual and social relations. In the context of these changes, Dewey, in declared opposition to the model of the so-called Traditional School⁸, seeks the unity of the knowledge of philosophy, psychology and experimental pedagogy. The author believes that this conciliation, together with the scientific method, would help the student to act in a society that was in constant change and could also develop a participative, democratic, and socially responsible spirit.

In this sense, as Nascimento and Favoreto (2018) emphasize, Dewey takes the position of seeking in pedagogy the essential elements to correct the problems of the bourgeois society. Thus, it is emphasized that the American intellectual perceived the need for a social reconstruction, which should have as its main element, school education. This, in turn, should be organized and guided by the teacher, through experiences, to develop in the student the formation of new habits of reflection.

However, in the teaching process, the experience would not be limited to the immediate individual and/or the unreflected everyday life, but the experiences lived by the student would be considered with scientific and social experiences and accumulated knowledge. Then, school teaching, in the form of problem situations, would provoke student's interest and effort in interpreting data, examining relationships, hypothesizing, and verifying the extent and consequences of decisions made. In such a teaching process, interest would not be limited to the student, but would turn to the broad sense of society, which would correspond, in Dewey's theory, to democratic participation.

In defending his pedagogical model, Dewey (1978) points out several errors of the interest theory and the effort theory prevalent in his time. Among the mistakes discussed, the intellectual pointed out the fact that both categories were worked in isolation. Therefore, for the author, such a view would harm students morally and intellectually since they would not take advantage of their mutual benefits.

In the same reading, about the theories that defended only the interest, the American author highlights that one should be careful with interesting educational practices. According to Dewey (1978, p. 69, emphasis added), "since we have to make things 'interesting', it is because the object or idea is not interesting. He further states that the very phrase – 'make interesting' – is false. The thing, the object, is not made more interesting than it is". That is, for the philosopher, interest cannot be artificial, because it must have meaning for the individual. Moreover, Dewey (1978) warns that the attempt to make things interesting could harm the reflexive quality of the interaction between object, environment, and person.

Similarly, when dealing with the theory of effort, he points out that it could be harmful when put in a way contrary to interest. Thus, he points out the risks of working the two categories in a watertight manner, stating that "this theory either forms the man narrow and fanatical, obstinate and irresponsible in his preconceived beliefs and principles, or of a mechanical, rigid, unintelligent character, where the vital sap of spontaneous interest is missing" (Dewey, 1978, p. 64). According to Dewey (1978), the truly educational interest is that

⁷ There are several Dewey researchers who cite changes in society that may have influenced the educational debate, among which are Galliani (2014), Biasotto and Galter (2016), Buzin (2021), and Buzin and Favoreto (2021) cited here for bringing general aspects of industrial production and capitalist politics.

⁸ On the definition of Traditional School, see Saviani (2012b).

which promotes growth and development in the individual. The effort, on the other hand, must be intrinsically related to the continuity of thought and reflection. Given, the author states that

The question is not the amount of energy and force expended, but how the 'thought of an end' in view persists despite difficulties, inducing one to reflect on the nature of the obstacles and the available elements by which to remove them (Dewey, 1978, p. 89, author's emphasis).

Seeking to overcome the errors of the dissociation between interest and effort, the American philosopher asserts that both categories should be integrated and connected activities. Dewey (1978 p. 70, author's emphasis) defines that

True interest is the result accompanying the identification of the "I" with an object or idea, indispensable to the complete expression of an activity which the "I" itself has initiated. The effort, in the sense in which it is opposed to interest, implies a separation between the self and the fact to be assimilated or the task to be accomplished, thus producing a habit of dissociating activity.

Therefore, in deweyan theory, interest and effort need each other to become mental activities in the individual. If interest alone exists, the continuous exercise of thought is lacking, and, consequently, individual effort is lacking. Furthermore, if an action is based only on effort, it will be a mechanical act, since there will be no identification of the "I", that is, the personal relationship of the meaning of the activity will be missing.

It is understood, then, that in a univocal process, interest and effort would be important categories for the intellectual formation of the individual, because together they would propitiate the reflective movements of thought in an integrated activity. Such action would form habits of reflective thinking, necessary for the constitution of what the philosopher assumed should be bourgeois democracy.

However, the two categories would not be enough to form a democratic society: it was necessary to unite them in reflective teaching practice, involving other categories of experimental pedagogy. Thus, for Dewey (1936, p. 179-180, emphasis added),

'Interest' and 'discipline' are correlative aspects of activity provided with a goal. Having a person interested means that he has identified himself with the objects that determine the activity and that provide the means and originate the obstacles for its realization. All activity with a goal implies a distinction between a previous incomplete phase and another phase that completes it; and therefore, it implies 'intermediate acts'. To have an interest is to take things as part of this situation that develops with continuity instead of considering them in isolation. In the time between a certain incomplete situation and the desired complete situation, an 'effort' is required to effect transformation. This also requires attention and patient perseverance. This attitude is what we virtually mean by the expression "willpower". Its result is discipline, or the development of the ability to pay continuous attention, to unfold persevering effort.

In the meantime, in a pedagogical practice organized and guided by the teacher, Dewey assumed that he could create an environment conducive to the development of curiosity and the participation of all in the search for solutions to problems. To this end, it should develop the ability to learn collectively and continuously. Thus, the two categories should be allied to discipline, so that autonomy, co-participation, and social responsibility could be formed in individuals. Thus, we agree with Buzin and Favoreto (2021) when, discussing the teaching of art in Dewey, they point out that the author

[...] defended experimental pedagogy, which he believed, allied to science and art, could develop reflective thinking, interest, discipline, effort, autonomy, co-participation and social responsibility; habits that, according to the intellectual, were essential for all to have access to cultural and economic goods so that democracy could be realized (Buzin & Favoreto, 2021, p. 157).

Because of the above, it is understood that when Dewey takes up the debate on the categories of interest and effort, he positions himself in favor of the integration of such categories in a teaching environment organized and guided by the teacher. Consequently, in his pedagogical perspective, the teacher should intervene in the educational process, to develop the student's curiosity, observation, research, and experimentation in groups, expanding their ability to make group decisions and evaluate them regarding the proposed objectives. For the author, more than pedagogical techniques, a favorable educational environment should be created. Thus, in opposition to the rigidity of traditional school - which, according to the philosopher, prioritized the repetition of formalized knowledge - Dewey argued that interest, effort, and discipline, combined with scientific knowledge and in a pedagogical environment, could enable individuals to learn how to solve individual and social problems.

Given this, the categories of interest and effort should be worked in an integrated way with each other, as well as with the other categories of experimental pedagogy, such as observation, investigation, data analysis, experimentation, verification of results, continuity, co-participation, autonomy, and responsibility. In this way, the American philosopher believed that it would be possible to develop the student's reflexive capacity in favor of conscious and collective action, thus increasing the equality of participation in public affairs and the possibilities of advancing the development of an industrial and democratic society.

Thus, these factors would imply a change from individual habits, especially self-centered ones, to a spirit of collective participation. Then, the democratic society would be the result, concomitantly, of the practice of democracy at school, in which one would learn to dominate the instincts of superficial and individual activities, providing opportunities for meaningful and beneficial actions to the social group. Through discipline and legitimate interest and effort directed at social life issues, the individual would become a responsible being, capable of acting in society with autonomy, in the sense of knowing how to make choices and solve their problems with awareness of their social belonging.

In sum, it is important to highlight that Dewey, when defending the equal participation of individuals in society, stood firm in his theoretical and political position. Furthermore, the equality he defended aimed to solve the problems of bourgeois society, correcting the intellectual, moral, and cultural deficits that could, according to the philosopher, hinder social progress.

Final considerations

As we go through Brazilian historiography, we notice that Dewey's pedagogical categories are little explored, while it is a theorist who divides opinions, being the target of both negative criticisms and defenses. In the Brazilian historiographic path, following the example of Anísio Teixeira and other "escolanovistas", it is verified that Dewey's theory has already been defended as a guide in the formulation of an educational project to be implemented in Brazil. Among the negative criticisms, authors with a pedagogical perspective include the North American philosopher of the "active school" theory, claiming that his pedagogy devalued the role of the teacher and the scientific content in the teaching process (Libâneo, 2003; Motta e Urt, 2007). Moreover, from a political point of view, other theorists who disserted on the ideal of an education that could be an instrument for a project of social revolution, criticized the limits of Dewey's theory, implicitly pointing out its liberal character (Jones, 1989; Andrade, 2007; Saviani, 2012b; Galiani, 2014; Nascimento & Favoreto, 2018). Similarly, criticism also falls on the fact that Dewey places the responsibility for resolving society's conflicts on the school, by prioritizing the solution of social problems in his actions (Galiani, 2014; Nascimento & Favoreto, 2018).

Still, about the categories of interest and effort, it was found that many theorists mention them, but they are cited in a watertight way, without relating them as intrinsic, as well as not presenting them concerning the other categories of Dewey's thought⁹. It was observed that the category of interest is the object of research by numerous scholars¹⁰; on the other hand, the category effort - as a deweyan pedagogical category - has not received the same attention. In short, few studies address the two categories as undivided; in this regard, the works of Simões (2010), Rocha (2011), Gotarde (2016), and Buzin (2021) stand out¹¹, which were concerned with presenting both according to Dewey's thought.

It is noteworthy that the categories were part of an educational and social project. On one hand, the goal was to overcome the principles of the traditional school that predominated in the educational practices of the time. On the other hand, Dewey, observing the rapid economic and political changes in society, believed that the school should adapt to the new social rhythms - that is, to the constant technical, productive, and social changes.

In his pedagogical plan, Dewey believed that the school should reproduce problem situations in its interior, to develop in the student's curiosity, observation, research, and experimentation in groups, through interest and effort. In this case, interest and effort should be worked in an integrated way, as well as about the other categories of experimental pedagogy, such as continuity and constant co-participation, in an environment organized by the teacher and under his guidance; thus, students should make decisions and evaluate them as to the goals to be achieved. Thus, from the formation of new reflexive habits, allied with the scientific method

⁹ Santos (2013) and Sass & Liba (2011) work only with the category of interest.

¹⁰ Authors include: Schwengber & Schütz (2018) and Dalbosco (2018) - who write about interest and discipline -; Lourenço Filho & Mendonça (2014) - discussing interest and student autonomy -; Bernardino (2009) - who uses the categories of interest and motivation -; Trindade (2009) - when addressing interest and democratic society.

¹¹ Also discussing the categories of interest and effort are Muraro (2016), Andrade (2007), Baraldi (2013), Mattos (2008), Carvalho & Guizzo (2016), Biasotto (2016), Marcondes (2017), Lima (2014), Souza (2019), Schmidt (2009), Pereira et al. (2009), Bin (2012), Medeiros (2013), Biasotto & Galter (2016), Ali (2014), and Pizzi (2015).

and group research, Dewey believed that it would be possible to expand the participation of all in society, developing the participatory spirit with respect and collective responsibility, which could result in a factor of social development.

In this respect, Dewey's reflections contributed to the pedagogical debates of his time. Thus, besides pedagogical techniques, the American author, uniting the knowledge of experimental pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, and society, took the position of defending an education that would correct the limits of bourgeois democracy. For him, it would be in the development of bourgeois democracy and industrialization that it would be possible to build a better society. For him, the formation of new reflexive habits could be a sure possibility for the development of democracy and society.

Finally, without taking sides on Dewey's social position, we highlight that the recovery of the categories of interest and effort is important to reflect on education in the current context since both categories are constantly indicated as important factors in the solution of educational problems. However, based on Dewey, they are not categories that are made by themselves but should be thought of in an integrated way, insofar as they only become useful if they are considered with the student and with the constant guidance of the teacher. Therefore, these categories are part of an educational project, which, through pedagogical experience, hopes to develop in the students the necessary spirit for the capitalist society.

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The authors were responsible for the design, analysis, and interpretation of the data; writing and critical review of the manuscript content; and approval of the final version to be published.