LOCATING DEWEY'S "LOST INDIVIDUAL" THROUGH 21ST-CENTURY EDUCATION

Lance E. Mason
Indiana University Kokomo

In the first half of the 20th century, the time's new economic order of assembly-line industry, mass-media communications, and mass-consumer culture along with rapidly increasing urbanization, in many cases, disrupted community connections meant to forge strong and secure individuals. Dewey uses the term "lost individual" to describe citizens who had become disconnected from social and community bonds, left to fend with diminished social support in increasingly confusing social and political environments.[1] Dewey maintains humans are inherently social and derive their sense of individuality from social and environmental transactions, yet in the absence of strong community bonds, other environmental factors gain influence. Dewey asserts, "the individual cannot remain intellectually a vacuum. If his ideas and beliefs are not the spontaneous function of a communal life in which he shares, a seeming consensus will be secured as a substitute by artificial and mechanical means."[2] The "artificial and mechanical means" Dewey criticizes include the then-emerging world of popular entertainment separating leisure from community life, turning art and aesthetics into a means of individualized escapism rather than something communally experienced, shared, or produced. The time's lost individuals indulged in escapist entertainment and became politically apathetic because, according to Dewey, they were unable to make connections between their own circumstances and the formative features of the larger social and political world.

The 20th-century, social world's fragmentation was greatly accelerated by the "information revolution" and the continued march of neoliberal economic globalization. Today individuals find themselves in a social and political world more diffused and, ultimately, more confusing. Kosnoski states,

> Because of the inability to situate oneself in one's fragmented and dispersed social environment, local problems seem unconnected to any specific causation, therefore attempts to address them inevitably remain partial, momentary, and

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[1] John Dewey, *Individualism Old and New* (1930; repr., Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1999).
[2] Ibid., 41.

> fragmentary. This leads to frustration, disempowerment, and the further turning inward of political perspective.[3]

Disconnection between individuals and their social environment has grown more severe in the early 21st century. Dewey's explication of lost individuals can be understood as an incipient analysis of the atomized or "individualized"[4] individual detached from local connections and immersed in mass culture.

Over the course of the 20th century, the US government has played a steadily increasing role in education policy.[5] Neoliberal economic logic promoting the expansion of market forces underpins assumptions of efficiency behind standardized tests. In the vision of education promoted by legislation such as *No Child Left Behind,* students are treated as consumers and future workers who must obtain the proper skills to compete in the global economy, while goals of educating students for citizenship are largely, if not entirely, neglected.[6]

I argue Dewey's conception of the lost individual and his proposed solutions for reconstruction can help both schooling and society address problems of depoliticization and individualization. I first examine Dewey's notion of formation of the self forged through transactions with one's physical and social environments. Next, I explore Dewey's process of growth achieved through the acquisition and modification of *habits* by way of inquiry and reflection. The development of democratic habits is neglected in the prevailing vision of 21st-century education, increasingly focused on a narrow set of core content and skills. While Dewey is not averse to content or skill acquisition, he identifies habit formation as a central feature of education. I maintain by focusing on overly narrow measures and neglecting student growth, the prevailing model of US education contributes to the production of lost individuals.

Dewey's Formation of the Self

Dewey grounds the formation of the self in a naturalistic metaphysics in which individuals are in continuous transactions with their environment. He rejects the transcendental self, instead seeing humans as inherently social and

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[3] Jason Kosnoski, *John Dewey and the Habits of Ethical Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 3.

[4] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2000).

[5] Robert L. Linn, "A Century of Standardized Testing: Controversies and Pendulum Swings," *Educational Assessment* 7, no. 1 (2001): 29–38; E. Wayne Ross, "The Struggle for the Social Studies Curriculum," in *The Social Studies Curriculum*, ed. E. Wayne Ross, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 17–33.

[6] Henry A. Giroux, "Curriculum Planning, Public Schooling, and Democratic Struggle," *NASSP* 75, no. 12 (February 1991): 12–25; Joe Onosko, "Race to the Top Leaves Children and Future Citizens Behind," *Democracy and Education* 19, no. 2 (2011): 1–11; Ross, "Social Studies Curriculum."

deriving their sense of individuality from social and environmental transactions. Dewey explains, "through the influence of the social environment each person becomes saturated with the customs, the beliefs, purposes, skills, hopes and fears of the cultural group to which he belongs."[7] Individuals learn about the world through these transactions, which modify their impulses and help form what Dewey calls *habits*. His concept underscores a complex interplay of conscious and subconscious elements. Dewey defines *habit* as:

> That kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity.[8]

Habits can be understood as sensitivity to particular stimuli, as their manifestation suggests certain dispositions of behavior and tendencies toward action. Habits are acquired through prior activity, and are in many ways synonymous with, though not reducible to, will. These habits constitute the self; they form the foundation from which all bodily and mental functions are derived. Individuals draw their habits, and hence their individuality, from culture, constituting a direct link between the vibrancy of a local culture and the individuality of its citizens.

Dewey's notion breaks down mind/body dualisms, as habits are simultaneously physical and mental, as well as moral, in nature. Dewey asserts,

> Our ideas truly depend upon experience, but so do our sensations. And the experience upon which they both depend is the operation of habits. . . . Thus our purposes and commands regarding action (whether physical or moral) come to us through the refracting medium of bodily and moral habits.[9]

Moral judgment resides in the habits acquired through lived experience in adaptive reactions to environmental stimuli.

Dewey emphasizes the formative nature of social forces on human conduct, yet he also identifies a process whereby individuals differentiate themselves from one another. The beginning of individuality, according to Dewey, emerges through what he calls *impulses*—natural reactions to stimuli that take shape through interactions in particular environments, working to

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[7] John Dewey, "Need for a Philosophy of Education," in *John Dewey on Education*, ed. Reginald D. Archambault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 10.

[8] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1922), 40.

[9] Ibid., 32.

form new habits, in some cases, while modifying existing habits in others. An individual's character consists of habits formed through modification of impulses and is subsequently dependent upon the quality of their experiences. Dewey asserts, "everything depends upon the kind of experience that centers in him. Not the residence of experience counts, but its contents, what's in the house."[10]

One's habits persist until one's environment rejects them. As this occurs, individuals must continually adjust their habits to harmonize with their environment.[11] Individuality emerges through diverse experiences achieved primarily out of active participation in processes of communication. While conscious reflection is necessary in this process, it is a secondary phenomenon that occurs only after a disruption of habits. Lehmann-Rommel explains, "participation in the daily activities comes before observation and reflection and comprises emotions, intentions, intuitions, desires, needs, and habits."[12] The "felt sense" of a problem induces reflection, triggering thought that ultimately can allow one to adjust habits[13]—altering attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. "Transactional constructivism,"[14] involving transactions between an individual, his or her environment, and the subsequent interplay between subconscious habits and conscious reflection, allows an individual to achieve *growth*.

Transactional relations are not one-way impositions upon an individual. In a thriving environment with vibrant transactions between individual and social, the individual is able to alter social conditions. When flexible habits and careful reflective thinking are cultivated, what emerges are intelligent, "embodied, enculturated agents"[15] able to exert control over their environment. Flexible, intelligent habits are "vehicles of power"[16] that open up a field of agency in which individuals become empowered to affect their environment in positive ways. The extent of an individual's control depends upon acquiring complex habits of inquiry and reflection "marked by plasticity or flexibility and

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[10] Ibid., 292.

[11] Mark Uffelman, "Forging the Self in the Stream of Experience: Classical Currents of Self-Cultivation in James and Dewey," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 47, no. 3 (2011): 319–339.

[12] Roswitha Lehmann-Rommel, "The Renewal of Dewey—Trends in the Nineties," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19, no. 1 (2000): 192.

[13] John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1933).

[14] Gert Biesta and Nicholas Burbules, *Pragmatism and Educational Research* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

[15] Vincent Colapietro, "Embodied, Enculturated Agents," in *Dewey Reconfigured: Essays on Deweyan Pragmatism*, ed. Casey Haskins and David I. Seiple (New York: Rodopi, 1999), 155.

[16] Roudy W. Hildreth, "Reconstructing Dewey on Power," *Political Theory* 37, no. 6 (2009): 791.

openness to new conditions that [liberate] the original impulse behind the habit to seek new forms of expression."[17] Acquiring these intelligent habits depends upon opportunities for continuous transactions within a vibrant community open to the potential of shared communication.

Individuality is an achievement, but not the achievement of the isolated individual. Rather, individuality is accomplished as part of a community practicing communal habits of inquiry and reflection, thereby imparting those habits to individuals. In turn, those individuals bring new ideas and perspectives into the social environment that disrupt customs and traditions and promote growth among fellow citizens. Hence, Dewey dissolves the dualism between individual and social, as the two thrive together.

In the self forged through habits, Dewey opens experience to what Christopher Lasch calls a "conversational relationship with the past" where one "seeks neither to deny the past nor to achieve an imaginative restoration of the past but to enter into a dialogue with the traditions that still shape our view of the world."[18] This dialogue is performed by individuals in transactional relations with others as they continually co-construct meaning while modifying individual habits to adapt to changing circumstances. Habituated agents continually use the past's "funded knowledge" as a basis for intelligent engagement and modification of customs and traditions. Through this communicative process, one's world of meaning is enriched as connections with one's world grow. Thus, Dewey's self is distinguished from the traditional unified self as well as the fractured self sometimes described in poststructural analysis, where the self is argued to be articulated entirely through discourse without any further grounding. By contrast, Dewey's self can be understood as neither fractured nor in unity, but rather in *continuity* as "we are constantly seeking to unify the story of our lives aesthetically."[19] The self tends toward stability over time as increased experience and understanding offer an individual greater control, understanding, and mastery over a multitude of environments.

Centrality of Communication to Growth

Dewey's notion of self in continuity illuminates how educators can foster agency among students, while highlighting the role of local community and its traditions in the process. In both classrooms and communities, communication within and between groups opens possibilities for rich learning

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[17] Roger Bergman, "John Dewey on Educating the Moral Self," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 24, no. 1 (2005): 48.

[18] Christopher Lasch, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," in *Community in America*, ed. Charles H. Reynolds and Ralph V. Norman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 178.

[19] Jim Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 145.

experiences where members articulate their impressions, receive feedback from others, and modify their positions, attitudes, and beliefs. As Dewey posits,

> when communication occurs, all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation, whether it be public discourse or that preliminary discourse termed thinking. Events turn into objects, things with a meaning.[20]

In this process, connections are made that not only enrich understanding of the immediate matter but also imbue a broad range of topics with added meanings by virtue of connections made through the communicative process. In this way, communication enriches experience, connecting with impulses and honing habits toward more effective social action.

The act of give-and-take—of speaking and listening—produces meaning, but such meaning is not derived merely from the exchange of information. Although information exchange is important, a more crucial point of communication is the meaning created *within* the exchange. Meaning is achieved primarily through participation in the constructive process, the *activity itself*. Dewey asserts,

> Meaning is not indeed a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior, and secondarily a property of objects. But the behavior of which it is a quality is a distinctive behavior; cooperative, in that response to another's act involves contemporaneous response to a thing as entering into the other's behavior, and this upon both sides.[21]

Dewey draws from Mead's analysis of intersubjective communication, based upon an anticipatory structure where individuals adjust to that anticipated from the "other" in what Biesta calls a "matrix of coordinated action."[22] As transactions continue, meanings are co-constructed and reconstructed as meanings are exchanged and become shared. Within the active process of participatory communication, the self is forged and meaning is achieved for both individuals and groups.

Communication also can be a consummatory experience—a pleasurable end in itself.[23] Meanings are not only enhanced in this process, they become shared. Barriers are broken down and communal action, including

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[20] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1924; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 1958), 166.
[21] Ibid., 179.
[22] Gert Biesta, "Redefining the Subject, Redefining the Social, Reconsidering Education: George Herbert Mead's Course of Philosophy at the University of Chicago," *Educational Theory* 49, no. 4 (1999): 483.
[23] Dewey, *Experience and Nature.*

further processes of inquiry, becomes easier to achieve. Through communication, an individual's habits become more flexible and varied, making further adjustment easier along with making an individual more sensitive and responsive to his or her environment. It is through this process of active participation in thriving transactional communities, while continually engaging in processes of common meaning making with others, in which Dewey's lost individuals can be "found" or, more precisely, how individuals are able to construct meaningful connections between themselves and the larger social and political world.

The Meaning-Making Functions of Communities

Focusing on Dewey's concept of communication clarifies his contention, made in *The Public and Its Problems*, that possibilities for creating the "Great Community" rest upon local communities' vibrancy composed primarily of face-to-face interactions.[24] When one considers Dewey's concerns about lost individuals in conjunction with his notion of democracy as "the idea of community life itself,"[25] it becomes clear that daily interactions within local communities are crucial to forming democratic habits and dispositions. However, Dewey offers few details as to the particulars of these community transactions. Scholars in the latter half of the 20th century, many of whose work loosely associates with communitarianism, offer some specifics.

Robert Putnam charts decline among voluntary associations, finding steadily diminishing participation in the 20th century's latter decades.[26] Parent-teacher organizations and other public meetings also have endured decreased participation, with attendance falling by almost half between 1973 and 1994.[27] Putnam's analysis is grounded in the concept of *social capital,* or participation in social organizations that facilitates mutually beneficial, social action. Putnam concludes "members of associations are much more likely than nonmembers to participate in politics, to spend time with neighbors, to express social trust."[28] Supporting research suggests social capital "is a by-product of the social interactions with a citizen's discussants"[29] and an important factor in facilitating political involvement.

Ray Oldenburg discusses the importance of informal gathering places, what he calls *third places* (neither work nor home), to the vitality of local

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[24] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927; repr., Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1946).

[25] Ibid., 146.

[26] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001).

[27] Thomas H. Sander and Robert D. Putnam, "Still Bowling Alone? The Post-9/11 Split," *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 9–16.

[28] Putnam, "Bowling Alone," 73.

[29] Ronald La Due Lake and Robert Huckfeldt, "Social Capital, Social Networks, and Political Participation," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 3 (1998): 581.

community life.[30] Sites such as bars, taverns, coffee shops, and bookstores are places where patrons gather, often making subtle and informal local connections while deliberative democratic dispositions are cultivated. A *third place* is not just any bar or coffee shop, Oldenburg argues, but can be distinguished by its largely local clientele, its vibrant conversation, and its lack of outside distractions such as televisions or video games. Conversation is the main activity and younger members learn by observing the interactions of elders and, over time, join as full participants.

Oldenburg's examination of third places aligns with Dewey's understanding of democracy as more than a system of government, but also as a way of life[31] embodied in citizens' daily practices nurtured by a "thickly interwoven social fabric"[32] of relations which "signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all relations of life."[33] Together with voluntary associations, third places are anchors of local neighborhoods and communities where thick connections encourage public responsibility in ways difficult to replicate through bureaucratic or other means.[34] Oldenburg's analysis speaks to the importance of fostering democratic habits through continual, direct engagement with familiar and perhaps not-so-familiar "others" on matters that range from trivial concerns to those of serious social import. Such communicative experiences foster habits of patience, openness, and the ability to participate meaningfully in conversation by listening carefully and speaking in turn. Communicative experiences also broaden individuals' horizons as they transact with diverse others.

From the perspective of Deweyan communication, the continuous meaning-making that occurs through direct conversation within voluntary associations and third places allows individuals to create meaning by making connections between their own lives and the larger world. These practices foster individuality even as individuals practicing them simultaneously make positive contributions to the community, suggesting theorists concerned about the state of democratic life should examine how citizens' and students' daily practices contribute to meaning-making. Additionally, as Oldenburg suggests, exploring how some practices encourage individuals to isolate themselves from

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[30] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Da Capo, 1999).

[31] John Dewey, "Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us," in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953,* ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 224–230.

[32] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Democracy at Century's End: The Social Service Review Lecture," *The Social Service Review* 70, no. 4 (1996): 508.

[33] Dewey, "Creative Democracy," 226.

[34] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995).

meaningful engagement and pointing educators toward directions for achieving deeper connections between students and communities will, consequently, improve meaning-making among both youth and adults.

Town forums and public meetings are still commonplace in local communities. In conjunction with a variety of local settings, including but not limited to those highlighted by Putnam and Oldenburg, local forums and public meetings provide models for communication as common meaning-making and may also hold potential for fostering school and community connections wherein democratic dispositions can be cultivated by students through authentic participatory communication. I suggest if educators' goal is to cultivate individuality through robust social engagement, deeper inquiry into daily communication practices is warranted. More attention must be paid to the consequences of communication practices and habits and dispositions fostered through such practices.

In contrast to democratic dispositions cultivated in voluntary associations and third places, much prevailing contemporary cultural ethos encourages "an unprecedented state of impatience"[35] in which people attempt to accomplish an ever-greater number of tasks each day. Electronic devices allow people to "multitask," which may help increase efficiency but also fosters practices that contribute to more-narrowly utilitarian forms of interpersonal interaction. A focus on speed and efficiency and a hurried lifestyle neither encourage civic participation nor spending one's leisure time in third places. Rather, trends toward increasingly isolated home entertainment and, more recently, the popularity of mobile digital devices can be seen as an extension of the commodification and privatization of leisure,[36] in which users are encouraged to create a personalized world of mediated interaction based upon their own pre-constructed interests and preferences for social interaction and commodified entertainment. This offers the atomized individual a sense of empowerment through greater consumer choices, along with carefully controlling social interaction in both manner and degree.

Dewey argues such practices diminish the disruption of habits and consequently discourage growth and the formation of democratic dispositions. While technology itself is not to blame, assuming individualized practices do not affect user's dispositions and worldviews is based upon an impoverished conception of how humans create meaning. This understanding of meaning-making, present in much of the scholarship in technological and media literacy,[37] separates mind and body by reducing experience and agency to

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[35] Cory Anton, *Communication Uncovered: General Semantics and Media Ecology* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), 5.

[36] Zygmunt Bauman, "As Seen on TV," *Ethical Perspectives* 7, nos. 2/3 (2000): 107–121.

[37] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, "Critical Media

conscious will divorced from one's daily practices and experiences. The technological and media literacy perspective derives from assumptions communication is merely the transfer of information, and presumes information can be received wholly through a screen or digital device.

While individualized preferences and practices do not preclude processes of common meaning-making, they obscure the process' potential of information, better understood as a by-product of discussions, debates, and other direct transactions. Christopher Lasch explains, "when we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise we take in information passively—if we take it in at all."[38] Today's students and citizens are awash in information, but without the contextual shared communication that allows information to be transformed into meaningful knowledge, individualized entertainment practices and mobile digital devices are likely only to heighten the quagmire of lost individuals. A more robust understanding of Dewey's concept of habits, particularly habits' meaning-making functions of communication, can point educators and social theorists toward more fruitful engagement with the role of habitual practices and how they work to foster the components of individuality as well as a social spirit that makes one more likely to engage in communicative transactions with diverse others. Interwoven communities' model of thick communication can serve as a guide for the kind of connections made manifest in daily practices for both citizens and students.

AVENUES FOR EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

A pragmatist, Dewey asserts educators and policy-makers must make choices on which practices to value and emphasize in schools.[39] In order to make intelligent choices, educators must examine the consequences of what currently is valued. A preponderance of lost individuals immersed in processes of individualization can be understood as a consequence of current educational and social policies and practices. With respect to education, two features exemplify how US schools contribute to producing lost individuals.

The first feature is standardized testing. Enforced consequences of *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* narrow the range of practices within

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Literacy, Democracy, and the Reconstruction of Education," in *Media Literacy: A Reader*, ed. Donaldo Macedo and Shirley R. Steinberg (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 3–23; National Council for the Social Studies, "NCSS Position Statement: Media Literacy," *Social Education* 73, no. 4 (2009): 187–189; Howard Rheingold, "Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement," in *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*, ed. W. Lance Bennett, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 97–118.
[38] Lasch, *Revolt of the Elites,* 163.
[39] Cleo H. Cherryholmes, *Reading Pragmatism* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

classrooms by constraining the freedom of teachers and, subsequently, learners.[40] Such testing mirrors the aforementioned ethos of efficiency that strips communication of its meaning-making elements and reduces education to the transmission of decontextualized bits of information. By focusing on narrow outcomes, students largely are precluded from constructing their own meaning as teachers are compelled to move their practices away from meaningful activities toward rote learning exercises.

The second feature that contributes to the production of lost individuals is less obvious and less explored in educational scholarship: the push for technological ubiquity in schools. Many proponents of technology reject the behaviorist learning assumptions of standardized testing and instead embrace constructivist learning, in which students are encouraged to explore and collectively deliberate shared problems. Such tasks can encourage students to engage in constructive communication that facilitates robust meaning-making. Yet habits fostered as a result of digital immersion remain largely unexplored. Technology enthusiasts tout relevance to students' lives as a primary reason to immerse students in digital technology.[41] However, the broader habits of usage privilege models of interaction that, outside the controlled environment of the classroom, valorize utilitarian as opposed to meaningful engagement[42] and encourage consumerism[43] along with an ever-faster acquisition of information often untethered from social meaning-making processes. Digital technology may foster habit-forming practices more consistent with the utilitarian logic of standardized testing than those associated with the meaning-making, communicative engagement of participatory democracy. One example is blogging, which has been argued as an effective tool to extend classroom conversations beyond school hours.[44] While blogging can offer learning benefits, the practice may have vastly different meanings in other social contexts. Outside of school, students may find blogging's often-isolating, exclusive world a productively adaptive feature of contemporary life, while never considering the individualizing habits fostered through such practices.

While not dismissing obvious benefits to inquiry and potential meaning-making, educators should not treat digital technologies as inherently progressive. Educators employing a Deweyan lens should think not only about technology's immediate use value, but also about those habits inculcated in

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[40] Onosko, "Race to the Top."
[41] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; National Council for the Social Studies, "Media Literacy;" Rheingold, "Using Participatory Media."
[42] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
[43] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*; Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).
[44] Rheingold, "Using Participatory Media."

such usage. Teachers should not only use digital technology in meaningful ways, but also engage students in critical, reflective explorations of social practices' habit-forming functions: digitally mediated or otherwise. While student relevance is a factor for educators to consider, relevance alone does not provide a sufficient rationale for digital ubiquity in schools. From a Deweyan perspective, educators' focus should be on developing socially spirited habits among students, and digital technology's use can be justified to the extent it facilitates development of students' socially spirited habits.

Conclusion

Dewey asserts schools alone cannot fix the social order, but can function as an important locus of social improvement.[45] One way educators can address concerns about lost individuals is by fostering deeper connections between students and their local communities. Place-based education scholars[46] advocate involving students in direct-inquiry projects assisting their communities. Such projects "can help overcome the disjuncture between school and children's lives,"[47] an important step in recovering lost individuals. Locally, citizenship can be crafted by avoiding didactic lectures, since students make connections and find agency through participation in community projects. Academically, local connections can be used further to enlarge students' worlds by connecting local concerns regional, national, and international concerns. In the process of expanding outward from the local to the global, Dewey identifies his vision of the Great Community.[48] Place-based learning, service-learning projects, and other community education initiatives all provide fruitful avenues to further inquiry addressing lost individuals.

Dewey suggests discussion and shared communication are vital practices that challenge the notion of reducing learning to a series of decontextualized skills. Such practices should be viewed as a crucial piece of a larger educational ecology that extends beyond the classroom into the community's broader social fabric. From this perspective, intersubjective communication is the heart of meaning-making and, hence, the learning process. I argue for a much stronger role for student-to-student discussion and coöperative learning projects in addition to interdisciplinary learning and the aforementioned community-education initiatives—all of which offer students opportunities to make meaning together while using formal and informal learning in an integrated manner. Discussion and shared communication promotes an orientation toward the common good by tackling common

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[45] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Touchstone, 1938).
[46] Gregory A. Smith, "Place-Based Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 83, no. 8 (April 2002): 584–594; Paul Theobald and Jim Curtiss, "Communities as Curricula," *Forum for Applied Research and Policy* 15, no. 1 (2000): 106–110.
[47] Smith, "Place-Based Education," 584.
[48] Dewey, *Public and Its Problems*.

problems,[49] cultivating socially spirited habits[50] and teaching civic-mindedness[51]—characteristics that begin to address concern for lost individuals. Calls for digital and technological literacy should be considered within this learning ecology. From a Deweyan perspective, such practices should not be viewed as isolated skills to be obtained regardless of context, but rather as one set of tools among many that potentially can deepen social meaning for students in particular contexts. Students should critically and experientially explore the consequences of using digital technology in various contexts—examining how it can both help and hinder social meaning-making.

However, formal schooling alone cannot recover lost individuals. While educators can create safe and productive spaces for students' meaning construction, students' experiences will not necessarily translate into productive, worldly citizenship. Merging classroom activities to lived experience in local communities offers increased possibilities for students to find themselves in relation to the larger world. Schools can play a crucial role by crafting habits and dispositions geared toward inquiry and open communication, as well as direct engagement. A stronger focus on cultivating such habits within schools, while fostering school-community relations are some important ways to address the quagmire of lost individuals.

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[49] Benjamin Barber, "Challenges to the Common Good in the Age of Globalism," *Social Education* 64, no. 1 (2000): 8–13.

[50] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916).

[51] Walter C. Parker, "Public Discourses in Schools: Purposes, Problems, Possibilities," *Educational Researcher* 35, no. 8 (November 2006): 11–18.