

**Teodora Pezzano**

Associate Professor | Department of Culture Education and Society | University of Calabria | teodora.pezzano@unical.it

OPEN ACCESS

**Siped**  
Società Italiana di Pedagogia

Double blind peer review

**Citation:** Pezzano, T. (2024). Education, Well Being, Human Development. *Pedagogia oggi*, 22(1), 164-169. <https://doi.org/10.7346/PO-012024-21>

**Copyright:** © 2024 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Pensa MultiMedia and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. *Pedagogia oggi* is the official journal of Società Italiana di Pedagogia ([www.siped.it](http://www.siped.it)).

**Journal Homepage**

<https://ojs.pensamultimedia.it/index.php/siped>

**Pensa MultiMedia / ISSN 2611-6561**

<https://doi10.7346/PO-012024-21>

### ABSTRACT

The path of the theory of education to achieve an autonomous epistemological status has pointed out the plurality of scientific approaches to education. This dimension is oriented to improve critical thinking in each student for the development of the common good.

The aim of this paper is to analyze: a. what kind of relation can exist between democracy and education, as Dewey affirmed in *Democracy and Education* of 1916; b. what is the meaning of the principles of continuity, growth and interaction in the experience, as Dewey analyzed in *Experience and Education* of 1938; c. the meaning of the “circular governance” based on the development of the individual capabilities connected to education, well being and human development. These principles must orient the individual to the well-being and human development, determined also by the «circular governance», which guides human values to project a possible inclusive school and society.

Il percorso della teoria dell'educazione per raggiungere uno statuto epistemologico autonomo ha messo in evidenza la pluralità degli approcci scientifici all'educazione. Questa dimensione è orientata a migliorare il pensiero critico in ogni studente per lo sviluppo del bene comune. Lo scopo di questo lavoro è quello di analizzare: a. che tipo di relazione può esistere tra democrazia ed educazione, come affermato da Dewey in *Democrazia ed educazione* del 1916; b. quale è il significato dei principi di continuità, crescita e interazione nell'esperienza, come analizzato da Dewey in *Esperienza ed educazione* del 1938; c. il significato di “circular governance” basata sullo sviluppo delle capacità individuali connesse all'educazione, al benessere e allo sviluppo umano. Questi principi devono orientare l'individuo al benessere e allo sviluppo umano, determinato anche dalla “circular governance”, che guida i valori umani per progettare una possibile scuola e una possibile società inclusiva.

**Keywords:** education | well being | human development | capability | democracy

**Parole chiave:** educazione | benessere | sviluppo umano | capacità | democrazia

Received: March 18, 2024

Accepted: April 11, 2024

Published: June 30, 2024

**Corresponding Author:**

Teodora Pezzano, [gteodora.pezzano@unical.it](mailto:gteodora.pezzano@unical.it)

## Introduction

The central issue of the contemporary educational research is mainly based on the possibility to define the educational development of the human being, so as to construct an inclusive school and society. In fact, according to the international debate, the project of an inclusive school in which each student can realize his/her potentiality and his/her well being is fundamental (De Luca, Domenici, Spadafora, 2023).

In this perspective the relationship between these three concepts: education, well being, and human development is important to clarify the meaning of democracy in the school and society. In fact, the importance of the school as the “laboratory of democracy” and the meaning of education as a “necessity of life” depends upon the development of the potentiality in each individual and the positive relationship between the different individuals according to the principles of democratic education (Dewey, 1897; Pez-zano, 2023).

To define this complex issue in such limited space, I will try to focus briefly on three questions, which could represent some interesting cultural roots of the well-being and human development: a. the concept of democracy linked to education, as Dewey described it in *Democracy and Education* of 1916; b. the concept of experience connected to education as it has been analyzed in Dewey’s book *Experience and Education* of 1938, which establishes the concept of capability; c. the relationship between education and human development based on the “circular governance” of the social systems.

### 1. Democracy and Education as “a Way of Life”

The concept of democracy is too complex in the contemporary debate, particularly in our historic and geopolitical situation where it is not clear the relation between the authentic dimension of democracy and its contemporary crisis, as described in the concept of “post-democracy”, which is opposite to the political structures of autocracies (Crouch, 2005).

A fundamental root to understand the concept of democracy in the educational perspective is represented by the Deweyan analysis of *Democracy and Education* of 1916 (Dewey, 1916).

This book is one of the most important John Dewey’s works, because it clearly focuses on the relation between philosophy, education and politics, as it has been clearly demonstrated (Spadafora, 2015) *Democracy and Education* is an expression of an educational dimension of democracy.

Education is a “necessity of life”, a “social function”, a “direction”, a “growth”, particularly it is a “reconstruction”, since this natural process of life determines the possibility of every individual to reconstruct continuously the personality adapting it to different situations of life.

These different meanings of education define human life as an expression of the educational process, closely linked to the complex development of the human being, either biologically, or in the social and economic situations.

In fact, the meaning of Deweyan democratic theory is represented by the definition of democracy as “a way of life”. This concept means that democracy is the most appropriate natural expression of human life and the real meaning of democracy is based on this concept. This ideas means that democracy is a political system, but before being a political system it is an ethical “way of life” (Striano, 2015).

The democratic values of the human life is to reconstruct an authentic democracy. This concept of democracy is quite different for Dewey from the different cultural and political paradigms in the Western tradition. First of all Dewey analyzes the Platonic paradigm of the *Republic*, in which it is represented an ideal model of the State, ruled by the philosophers, which represents the individual subjected to the aristocratic political classes; second he examines the paradigm of the individualism of the XVIII century, in which the individual develops spontaneously his/her personality according to Rousseau’s pedagogical theory, and to the natural principles of the human development. Moreover Dewey affirms that Rousseau’s theory highlights the diversities of the individuals; third, Dewey deals with the paradigm of the national State, which represents, especially in the German context, the meaningful relation between the State and the citizen (Dewey, 1916, Chapter 7).

The democratic ideal is the Deweyan answer to these three paradigms. Democracy is a sentiment. For

this reason it expresses an important relation with education. Democracy is “a way of life”, in other words the democratic education is a social behaviour in which it is necessary that the individual adapts himself/herself to different situations of life according to the theory of *Reflex Arc Concept* (Pezzano, 2017). Democracy is something more complex than a model of political government. It is an expression of associated life and intersubjective experience.

To realize democracy it is necessary to consider the intersubjective relation, the human development of every individual and its relation with others. To achieve this aim it is necessary to construct positive human relationships, analyze and understand the specificity of the intersubjective relation which determines the complexity of values in pedagogy between theory and practice (Colicchi, Baldacci, 2016).

The construction of democracy, then, is tied to the education of every individual connected to his/her intentions and choices. The three possibilities of the human action to develop a democratic education are: a. to develop the potentiality of every individual; b. to develop the cooperative relation between the individuals; c. to enhance the educators and teachers to develop aims within their human conduct.

In the ninth chapter of *Democracy and Education* it is fundamental the concept of “social efficiency”, which defines very clearly the meaning of the democratic educational activity. In contrast to Rousseau’s theory of natural education, Dewey affirms that human activity can construct the democratic “way of life”, only through the “social efficiency”. The concept of social efficiency represents the specific characteristic of a democratic society.

“Social efficiency”, according to the Deweyan interpretation, is the expression of an education based on the possibility to acquire meaningful knowledges and competences to become the skilled worker and an active citizen at the same time (Dewey, 1916, Chapter 9).

In fact the “social efficiency” is not only an education for the job, but particularly is an education based on culture. Culture and Civilization represent the most important aspects of a democratic education. Civilization is not a negative aspect of education, as Rousseau theorized, but is the fulfilment of the individual’s personal and social expectations. In other words “social efficiency” must educate the possible choices to adapt each project of life to the different aspects of the rights and duties of the citizen. The democratic way of life must be “devoted” to education, because it must permit that every individual can develop his/her embedded powers and dialogue freely on the different aspects of reality.

But the real characteristic of “social efficiency” is the centrality of experience. Democracy is a “way of life” only if you can develop the experience of the individual linked to the other experiences, because experience is a social phenomenon. For this, the relation between education and experience becomes central to understand the meaning of the well being connected to the human development.

In this perspective democracy must be considered the application of human activity to social environment. In fact democracy must permit the whole development of every citizen: physical, psychological, social and ethical. The possibility to realize this educational aspect of democracy can be verified in the relation between experience and education, which is connected to the category of capability.

### 3. Experience and Education. The Relation which Establishes the Concept of Capability

Democracy is based on education, because every individual has to define his/her well-being through the development of the embedded powers. In this perspective the focal meaning is to understand the role of experience linked to education.

The book *Experience and Education* was published in 1938, the same year in which Dewey published his fundamental research, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, one year before the publication of *Theory of Valuation* of 1939, a central analysis of the human conduct and values.

In this book Dewey tries to clarify the concept of experience, in relation to the scientific method. As Dewey asserts in the second edition of *Experience and Nature* (1st edition 1925; 2nd edition of 1929), human experience is extremely problematic, it is a place in which is quite difficult to balance the frustrations and the gratifications, the mistakes and the correct actions. Death, for instance, is a fundamental aspect of human experience, which must be considered a natural moment of human life.

From this perspective Dewey proposes his analysis of experience connected to education. This relation is fundamental to understand the passage from the traditional education to the progressive one. Focusing

on the importance of experience we can make this question: why does a particular discipline exist in the curriculum if it is not located within the structure of experience?

To establish a pedagogical theory of experience is based on the educational process, which can improve the student's freedom and the critical reflection of learning (Dewey, 1910, 1932).

Just for this reason it is necessary to begin a progressive education different from traditional education, based on a new conception of a theory of experience. In this perspective a theory of experience must give a positive sense to human conduct. Experience must be considered and studied according to a criterion of an experimental continuity, that determines the changes of a different existential situations.

Experience was not born in a vacuum, but it develops in a context of different social situations, determined also from the traditional education. For this reason education will determine the different dimensions of the human growth.

In this sense two are the most important epistemological principles of experience: the principle of continuity and the principle of interaction between the subject and the object within a specific situation in which the individual lives.

Every moment of human life is determined by this process of continuity and interaction that develops in human experience. In this educational situation determined by the continuity and interaction it is fundamental the concept of "social control", born from common cooperation and sharing rules. This situation determines the possibility of a social shared organization, where it is not necessary the authority, but the power diffused and self-managed (Dewey, 1938, Chapter 4).

In this perspective the teacher is considered a "director of conjoint activities", who can permit in every student the possibility of defining and realizing his/her project of life. The real aim of the relation between experience and education is to enhance the freedom of thinking, which represents a specific method to inhibit the impulses and orient the human actions. The meaning of education in human experience is defined by the ends pursued in human activity. The end is an action's planning which realizes the human conduct and interprets the problematic situation of experience.

The only way to plan the experience through education, then, is the method of intelligence, the application of experimental method to human life. Science and technology can orient the individual to good or evil and experience is the only place to understand the meaning of education (Dewey, 1938, Chapter 8; Hickman, 1991, 2001).

The educational process, then, is a complex process in which the method of intelligence determines the definition of human life based on the synergy of these three concepts: education, well-being and human development.

#### **4. Education, Well Being and Human Development as Expression of Human Capability to Construct Democracy**

From the proposed analysis it is clear that the roots of democracy must be discovered in the human actions oriented to permit that democracy can be considered a "way of life" before being a form of government.

But what is a "way of life"? Human experience is determined by human activity, swinging between theory and practice, promoting in every individual his/her expectations of life, the tastes, the ethical conduct, but overall the possibility of construction of the personality in the experience. (Malavasi, 2020; Fabbri, 2023, 2024)

This possibility is strictly related to the complex concept of well-being connected to ethical and economic principles. In fact well-being is not only an expression of good wealth as absence of illness, as World Health Organization affirms, but a specific function of human activity which adapts itself to the environment (d'Alonzo, 2017). The well being of an individual, then, is an aptitude to discover the inner calls and to define and improve the quality of his/her life.

First of all this quality of life depends on the adaptation of the individual to the environment with the limits of his/her personality through a bio-psychological and social approach. In this way it is possible that the economic and social life of the individual can improve democracy as social and political organization which promotes the participation of every individual to the construction of the common good.

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum define this personal aptitude and social conduct as a capability. This word means in the theory of education the possibility of every individual to expand his/her potentialities independently from the material wealth. It is clear that the concept of capability can be defined in a broader sense as a synergy between the concepts of education, well being and human development in the society and school.

In this specific field, then, a decisive educational value must be reinterpreted linking the capability of the individual to the concept of the “circular governance”.

These concepts, which derive from the Deweyan roots of democracy as “a way of life” and from education as a progressive experience, represent the educational paths to better understand the meaning of a possible relation between education, well being and development. The concepts of capability and capability approach have an economic matrix, especially clarified by Amartya Sen’s work and an important democratic meaning as the respect of diversities, analyzed in the Martha Nussbaum’s work (Amartya Sen, 2020; Martha Nussbaum, 2014).

The real meaning of capability, then, is an expression of the concept of democracy as project of life of every individual. Democracy is a “sentiment”, a natural development of the individual, who must have a social dignity in relation to the law and to other people, which can be studied in an educational perspective.

According to this reasoning the educational meaning of life must offer a social dignity for the individual and can determine the inevitable synergy between education well being and human development. In my opinion it is necessary to analyze two aspects of this issue: first, the specificity of the education of the individual. The education of every individual is a process very problematic developed between the intention and the unexpected event. *We become what we really are, because only the educational process gives sense to our life.* In this perspective pedagogy analyzes and orient human action towards the unexpressed future.

Second, the capability is fundamental because its central aim is to define the entire personality of the individual based on the human dignity and on the respect of the other people. The development of the individual in the environment and his/her capability of adapting to different changes determine the diversity and the particularity of every individual.

On the other side the intersubjective educational relation is asymmetrical and based on the possibility of sharing the common values and constructing others.

These two aspects are connected to the “circular governance”, which is the cultural and environmental sustainability inspired by the Agenda 2030. We apply this economic and cultural principle linked also to cultural heritage to define the possibility of mankind to construct a sustainable development from a social, political, ecological catastrophe. The “circular governance”, from an educational point of view, must be considered an important effort to construct in the family, school and society a sustainable environment. This kind of governance must evaluate the centrality of the individual. (Bosone M., et alii, 2019)

In this perspective it is very clear that the relation between the concept of democracy, theorized by Dewey, and the concept of “circular governance” is confirmed by some evidences. If the democracy is “a way of life”, a synthesis of education, well being and human development, only the effort to construct a representation of environmental and cultural sustainability can determine the possibility to build an authentic democracy. To rethink the *Agenda 2030* in this direction could help to theorize a model of a better geopolitical, economic and social order.

The social relations, of which the school represents an “embrionic society”, can be considered an organization that, in industrial and digital society, could control and limit the activity of every individual.

Pedagogy in this specific context must orient the individual and evaluate his/her centrality and dignity (Malavasi, 2020; Panciroli, Rivoltella, 2023). To project education, well being, and human development means a concrete possibility to establish democracy and a sustainable society. Our sustainable future, then, must be related to a theory of education to construct democracy.

## References

- Baldacci M. (2012). *Trattato di pedagogia generale*. Roma: Carocci.  
 Baldacci M., Colicchi E. (Eds.) (2016). *Teoria e prassi in pedagogia. Questioni epistemologiche*. Roma: Carocci.



- Bosone M., Micheletti S., Gravagnuolo A., Garzillo C., & Wildman A. (2019). Towards A Circular Governance for The Adaptive Reuse of Cultural Heritage. *Bollettino del Centro Calza Bini*, 19/2, 279-305.
- Crouch N. (2005). *Post-democrazia*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- d'Alonzo L. (2017). *La differenziazione didattica per l'inclusione. Metodi, strategie, attività*. Trento: Erickson.
- De Luca C., Domenici G., Spadafora G. (Eds.) (2023). *Per una inclusione sostenibile. La prospettiva di un nuovo paradigma educativo*. Roma: Anicia.
- Dewey J. (1916). Democracy and Education. In *The Middle Works*, vol. 9, SIUP, Carbondale, 1984.
- Dewey J. (1910, II ed. 1932). How We Think. In *The Middle Works*, 1899-1924, vol. 6: 1909-1910. SIUP, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1979.
- Dewey J. (1938). Experience and Education. In *The Later Works*, vol. 13: 1938-39. SIUP, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1984.
- Dewey J. (1938). Logic: The Theory of Inquiry. In *The Later Works*, vol. 12: 1925-1953. SIUP, Carbondale, 1986.
- Dewey J. (1939). Theory of Valuation. In *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 13: 1925-1953. SIUP, Carbondale, 1988.
- Dewey J. (2017). *Democracy and Education*, edited by Leonard J. Waks, Andrea R. English. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey J. (1916, 2018). *Democrazia e educazione. Una introduzione alla filosofia dell'educazione*, a cura di G. Spadafora. Roma: Anicia.
- Dewey J. (1938, 2014) *Esperienza e educazione*, a cura di Francesco Cappa. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Dewey J. (1897, 2023). *My Pedagogic Creed. Il Manifesto pedagogico per una scelta di vita democratica*. Introduzione, traduzione e cura di Teodora Pezzano. Roma: Avio.
- Fabbri M. (2023). Inclusione, sfida e paradigma. In *Per una inclusione sostenibile. La prospettiva di un nuovo paradigma educativo* (pp. 61-70). Roma: Anicia.
- Fabbri M. (2024). Dall'auctoritas all'autorevolezza. Per corsi antistorici di gestione del conflitto scuola-famiglia. In *La scuola ieri e oggi: insegnanti, alunni e didattica*. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, (pp. 203 - 219)
- Malavasi P. (2019). *Educare robot? Pedagogia dell'intelligenza artificiale*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Malavasi P. (2020). *Insegnare l'umano*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Martha Nussbaum (2014). *Non per profitto, Perché le democrazie hanno bisogno della cultura umanistica*. Bologna: Il Mulino
- Panciroli C., Rivoltella P.C. (2023). *Pedagogia algoritmica. Per una riflessione educativa sull'Intelligenza Artificiale*. Brescia: Scholé.
- Pezzano T., (2017). *Le radici dell'educazione. La teoria dell'esperienza in John Dewey*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Sen Amartya (2020). *Lo sviluppo è libertà. Perché non c'è crescita senza democrazia*. Milano: Mondadori.
- Spadafora G. (2015). *L'educazione per la democrazia. Studi su John Dewey*. Roma: Anicia.
- Striano M. (2015). *Per una teoria educativa dell'indagine. Riflessioni pedagogiche sulla logica di John Dewey*. Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia.