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# A reconstitution of John Dewey's philosophy of education

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**Abstract:** John Dewey's thought has influenced the pedagogical theories in Brazil. However, it had different interpretations in the country during the Escola Nova period. In general, these renderings discuss a learning method, and not a philosophy of education. Even, when it considers Dewey's philosophy of education, it does not focus on its esthetics. In this article, we will present some of these interpretations and also reconstruct John Dewey's ideas about art and esthetic experience, emphasizing his philosophy of education that is wider than a pedagogical method.

**Keywords:** John Dewey, 1859-1952, esthetics, philosophy, education, Escola Nova.

# Uma reconstituição da filosofia educacional de John Dewey

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**Resumo:** O pensamento de John Dewey influenciou amplamente os métodos educacionais brasileiros. Porém, em sua recepção no país durante o período da escola nova, tal pensamento recebeu interpretações distintas. Em sua grande maioria, essas releituras dizem respeito a um método de ensino e não propriamente a uma filosofia da educação e, mesmo quando é o caso, raramente, sua filosofia da educação é reconstruída à luz da dimensão estética. Neste artigo, apresentaremos as principais interpretações de seu pensamento, fazendo uma reconstituição das ideias de John Dewey sobre arte e experiência estética. Daremos ênfase à sua filosofia da educação, que é mais ampla do que um método pedagógico.

**Palavras-chave:** John Dewey, 1859-1952, estética, filosofia, educação, Escola Nova.

# Una reconstitución de la filosofía de la educación de John Dewey

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**Resumen:** El pensamiento de John Dewey influyó ampliamente los métodos educacionales brasileños. Sin embargo, en su recepción en el país durante el período de la escuela nueva, tal pensamiento recibió interpretaciones distintas. En su gran mayoría, estas relecturas dicen respecto a un método de enseñanza y no propiamente a una filosofía de la educación. Y, aun cuando interpretado de este punto, raramente, se reconstruye esa filosofía de la educación a la luz de la dimensión estética. En este artículo, presentaremos las principales interpretaciones, y también haremos una reconstitución de las ideas de John Dewey sobre arte y experiencia estética, dando énfasis a su filosofía de la educación, que es más amplia que un método pedagógico.

**Palabras clave:** John Dewey, 1859-1952, estética, filosofía, educación, Escuela Nueva

## The reception of John Dewey's thought in Brazil

In this article, we will present the partial results obtained in the PhD research entitled *Cinema, philosophy and education: possibilities of a poetics in teaching* (Angerami, 2014). We will reconsider John Dewey's thinking, especially interpreting the categories of art and aesthetic experience. In this sense, we will continue the investigations of authors such as Jay (1944) and Pagni (2012), who understood the philosopher's thinking from his concept of aesthetic experience.

The thought of John Dewey received distinct interpretations in his reception in Brazil in the Escola Nova period. This is demonstrated by Cunha (1999):

There is in the educational field a curious phenomenon of recontextualization - an expression coined by Bernstein (1996) - that can be understood as the transmutation of ideas, concepts and even theories to suit educational goals. Thus, in this process that seems inevitable to educators, the conceptions of a theorist can be taken in the most varied senses, from the most trustworthy to the most improper, and, therefore, it is sufficient that they are adequately arranged to meet the desires of the writer and of the circumstances in which it does so (Cunha, 1999, p. 44).

In the same line of Cunha, Ribeiro (2006) states that in the period from 1930 to 1964, the Brazilian educational thinking received a great influence from John Dewey. However, the author points out differences in the interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism and its appropriation.

The author analyzed the literature of the time, the reception of Dewey's pragmatism in the years following the Estado Novo period, when, according to her, "[...] the interpretations and appropriations of this theoretical source, developed by this and other Brazilian educators, become more diversified, due to the educational and pedagogical political debate, occupying the pages of educational periodicals, between 1944 and 1964" (Ribeiro, 2006, p. 8). In these interpretations, two tendencies are delimited: one that limits Dewey's thinking to a pedagogical theory and another that places it in the philosophy of education.

Newton Sucupira (1960), for example, understands his thinking on the basis of his notion of experience, conferring "[...] a metaphysical and ontological sense [...]" to it (Ribeiro, 2006, p 56), which, according to the

author, was not assumed by John Dewey himself. In this way, it shows that its reception in our country, to some extent, would have distorted, recontextualized or recreated it. In such an interpretation, the merely pedagogical appropriation of his thought was also criticized, implying a philosophical understanding of the relation of experience to nature.

From the perspective of Ribeiro (2006), Sucupira's interpretation is flawed, since he does not contextualize John Dewey's thinking "[...] within the level of a social and political philosophy, or even of a philosophy of education that necessarily possesses a method of analysis, a logic or research theory" (Ribeiro, 2006, p. 64). Anísio Teixeira, on the other hand, would have reduced John Dewey's thinking to a philosophical instrumentalism, in which "[...] philosophy would be improved by means of the scientific method, aiming at the constitution of an industrial society driven by science and democracy based on a political theory" (Ribeiro, 2006, p. 62). Through an investigative logic, both authors would seek to understand the knowledge and reflect on the experiences in order to decode the world to re-signify and modify it.

An important aspect of Anísio Teixeira's interpretation, however, is the relation that he establishes between the philosophical and pedagogical aspects of John Dewey's thought. According to Ribeiro,

More than conferring only an ethical sense to the concept of democracy, which would support the democratic conception of education, Anísio Teixeira seems to understand it as a promoter of a pedagogical practice that, in the limit, would be political, beginning with the school and, gradually, radiated by society. It would be political while a moral attitude, if not superior, at least marked by the situations relative to the context in which it would be produced. (Ribeiro, 2006, p. 77)

Jayme Abreu (1958), in the same vein as Anísio Teixeira, understands John Dewey's thinking as a philosophy of education capable of addressing aspects related to human values and guiding pedagogical practices. However, it limits the Deweyan philosophy to the scope of pedagogical practices. This author seeks to understand how the political and educational movements of the time were and how educational research was conducted.

Before this interpretation of the reception of pragmatism in Brazil, Cunha (1999) makes an analysis of the ideas of Dewey diffused in the

1950s, using as source the Brazilian Journal of Pedagogical Studies, periodical of INEP. The author points out two different directions in the interpretations contained therein: one, represented mainly by the theoreticians Anísio Teixeira and João Roberto Moreira; another, represented mainly by Luiz Alves de Mattos.

In the first line of interpretation, John Dewey's thought was understood as a philosophy that involved a theory of inquiry, in which "[...] thought has an instrumental function in the process initiated in a situation of perplexity or doubt and concluded in the establishment of a solution" (Cunha, 1999, p. 45). According to Cunha (1999), Anísio Teixeira thought that science was essential to philosophy, understood as a "[...] discipline that provides a constant discussion about human life and not as a dogma defining an eternal and immutable truth" (Cunha, 1999, p. 45). His conception of philosophy and science would have been inspired by John Dewey's logical theory.

We can conclude that this interpretive tendency of the North American philosopher would be focused on his logical theory, which, therefore, was misunderstood as the logic of formalization of thought. In this case, the aesthetic aspects of his theory of inquiry would not have been approached, suggesting that, from the beginning, these aspects of his philosophy were practically excluded in his reception in Brazil.

Still, for this interpretive aspect, philosophy based on scientific knowledge would serve as

[...] instrument to improve our understanding of life. This discovery made effective through scientific knowledge would serve to improve education by which issues essential for human coexistence could be better defined which, in turn, would result in the best use of science itself (Cunha, 1999, p. 45).

João Roberto Moreira, according to Cunha (1999), thought that science would contribute to scientific investigations. Thus, in the manner of John Dewey, through investigation, one could think both the Brazilian reality and the normative problems. In agreement with Cunha, "[...] educational problems were subjects of the social sciences as long as they were viewed under the Deweyan approach, contrary to the dichotomy between science on the one hand and philosophy on the other" (Cunha, 1999, p. 48).

In the second line of interpretation, John Dewey's thinking was taken only as a pedagogical method, unrelated to the whole philosophy of education. Ribeiro (2006) and Pagni (2012) point out that this is the most accepted interpretation in the educational field: that his thought was limited to a pedagogy. In this direction, Luiz Alves de Mattos, according to Cunha, placed John Dewey's thinking "[...] in the strictly pedagogical sphere, specifically within the educational chain that established planning as the main resource to be employed in school" (Cunha, 1999, p. 50)

The two lines of interpretation presented by Cunha (1999) are quite recurrent in the field of Brazilian education. John Dewey is studied in the courses of Pedagogy and often used as an inspiration of Brazilian educational methods, but most of the time the interpretation is related to a method of teaching and not to a philosophy of education. Even when the perspective is that of the philosophy of education, it is rarely interpreted in light of the aesthetic dimension of John Dewey's philosophy.

In the case of Brazil, one exception to this current interpretation is that of Ana Mae Barbosa, who has been leading the emergence of a more aesthetic vein in the interpretation of Dewey's thinking. Such an interpretation has circulated more in the scope of the relations of art with education, being little known in the philosophical-educational scope, above all, after the disciplinarization of this field and its specialization.

### **New front in the interpretation of John Dewey's thought**

In a study published in 1982, Ana Mae Barbosa (2011) analyzes the thinking of John Dewey, showing how much this influenced the teaching of art in Brazil. By historically reconstructing the moment of implementation and obligation of this education in the country, the author argues that in primary and secondary education, this occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the models and ideas proposed by Rui Barbosa in his Secondary and Higher Education Reform, dated 1882. Rui Barbosa was inspired by the North American Walter Smith to propose a method of teaching that prioritized the art and teaching of drawing in the educational curriculum.

The opinion of Rui Barbosa on secondary schools was widespread and used in primary schools. The author gave great prominence to the teaching of drawing and, according to Ana Mae Barbosa, "[...] until today no bill has granted more than 50 lines to the teaching of Art or teaching of the Drawing that, in the conception of Rui Barbosa, are identified." (Barbosa, 2011, p. 58).



Such ideas, so present in the curricula of Brazilian artistic education, according to Ana Mae Barbosa (2011), arrived philosophically better systematized through the figure of Anísio Teixeira. In the author's interpretation, the Escola Nova movement, of which Anísio Teixeira was one of the forerunners, incorporated the Deweyan idea of 'art as consummatory experience', that is, art helps the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of concepts. In this movement, art is also interpreted as the final stage of an experience. This idea, according to Ana Mae Barbosa (2011), is an error of interpretation, since, in Dewey's thinking, art illuminates the whole experience and not only its final stage. Art runs through the whole of experience, which is complete, full and satisfying, not restricted to a phase of experience that would aid in the acquisition of knowledge. Art unifies experience and gives it meaning. For the author,

[...] some interpretations of the concept of art as a consummatory experience exerted great influence on primary schools in Brazil. The Brazilian educators' interpretation of this concept is very similar to that of the United States Progressive Education Movement, that is, art as a means of aiding the concept and as the final stage of an experience (Barbosa, 2011, p. 135).

Thus, art is understood as the means by which children could organize and understand concepts worked in other areas, integrating the expression with several areas of knowledge.

Ana Mae Barbosa, in addition to relating the teaching of art to the thinking of John Dewey, points out misinterpretations of many theorists about John Dewey's thinking. For example, according to the author, Sampaio "[...] interpreted the relation between imagination and observation as if the imagination were subordinated to observation and as if it were necessary to progressively submit the spontaneous to the rational" (Barbosa, 2001, p. 83-84). For Dewey, experience is integral, and imagination and observation are interconnected, as well as spontaneous and rational. One thing does not occur after another, the experience is continuous and not dichotomous.

Barbosa (2011) claims that Perrelet's method, which came to Brazil in 1929 to be used in the organization of public education in Minas Gerais, was strongly influenced by John Dewey. In this method, centered on action and movement, actions and movements were considered the basis for reflection. According to Barbosa (2011), this method approached John

Dewey's idea of qualitative thinking, since it was understood that certain expressiveness and certain impulses would precede reason.

Dewey inspired the concept of art-education in educational reform not only in Pernambuco but throughout Brazil. According to Ana Mae Barbosa (2011), based on the analysis of the publications of the time,

[...] one can say that Dewey's influence in the Brazilian Escola Nova came mainly from his statements in *Experience, Nature and Art*, which appeared in 1925. In this essay, he states that it is impossible to establish a significant difference between useful art and fine art, because art, if it is truly art, necessarily includes the instrumental, the useful aspect (Barbosa, 2011, p. 145).

The educational character of art is due to the value that is attributed to experience. This is considered throughout its process, that is, there is no phase of experience that is more important, it is the whole. If it is complete, experience is aesthetic, unique, and in this sense, it is educational, both by distinguishing itself from other forms of experience and by breaking with mental habits.

From this perspective, it seems possible to observe not only the origin and development of John Dewey's influence on the constitution of the field of relations of art with education in Brazil, but also the demarcation of the reception of his philosophy through the aesthetic way, which places the artistic experience and qualitative thinking as primordial for their pedagogical and philosophical-educational conception. Thus, an interpretation not explored by the field of Philosophy of Education is presented. In proposing to address questions concerning the relations of art to education from a philosophical point of view, such an interpretation can refresh the reception of John Dewey's thought, indicating another way of appropriating it and providing a broadening of the subject. It is within this scope of research that we aim to contribute to the improvement of the interpretive aspect of John Dewey (Barbosa, 2011): our proposal is to indicate the possibility of a form of interpretation that values the aesthetic dimension of his thought in the field of Philosophy of Education in Brazil.

To this end, we consider essential to delineate the reconstruction of the concepts of Deweyan thought that corroborate these purposes, particularly those related to the understanding of experience, art and aesthetics. This is what we will present next.

## Understanding the concepts of experience, art, and aesthetic experience in John Dewey

The concept of experience is central to John Dewey's discussions of aesthetics and art. The author has a holistic and Hegelian view of reality, which makes it prohibitive to discuss concepts in isolation. These are understood not only through experience, but mainly through the relation and interaction of the subject with the natural and social environment. Furthermore, human experience must be understood holistically and integrally, for there is no separation of body, soul, emotion, reason, impulse, action, subject, object, and subjectivity.

In Garisson's (1997) interpretation, Dewey criticizes Plato because he rejects the dualism between the body and reason, between the natural and the supernatural, and considers existence as a single whole. The supernatural is understood as the natural which has not yet been discovered or created. The human side is part of nature, and humanity participates in an unfinished, endless universe. Dewey criticizes the Platonic separation between the practical world and the theoretical world, for it rejects any metaphysical domain of absolute and unquestionable truths. Things are changeable, uncertain, unpredictable. Dewey's Hegelian view means that he has an integrated understanding of the relation between mind and nature, subject and object of knowledge.

Cunha (2001) argues that in Dewey, the notion of movement is central, since, for him, the human being, society and school are in constant transformation. This concept can be understood as a 'changing world' and the universe would be an unstable place susceptible to transformations.

For Dewey (1934), experience is every relationship in which the organism and the environment are modified. Human experience is one in which meaning is attached to the relationship, which allows one to reflect on that experience. Through experience, the human being solves the problems of daily life, but cannot predict all the results or have guarantees for the future. The accumulation of experiences increases the probability of reaching the expected goal, but does not provide absolute certainty in relation to the expected result.

The experience to which Dewey (1934) refers goes beyond man's encounter with nature, since it is through the reflective element that he becomes capable of improving quality and ensuring the continuity of experiences. These must be shared and communicated, because the

meaning of the world and of things only makes sense when shared. The experience that occurs in the interaction of the human being with society and nature is continuous and cumulative because it promotes learning and modifications. For example, once the child burns the hand in the candle flame, he/she will never see the candle in the same way and lead to learning for future experiences: he/she will never experience the stimulus in the same way, for experience has been used for growth. Experience is considered significant when there is learning, as in the example above, when it is related to previous situations, making possible its applicability in future situations. Learning is characterized as a rhythmic movement that sometimes brings about imbalance, when the individual is faced with a new and dubious situation, and sometimes promotes balance, when he finishes something. It is the possibility of reflective thinking that guarantees us learning and allows us to accumulate experiences that, in the future, can serve as tools.

These experiences have a rational content, since they imply intentionality, planning, goal to be achieved. Thus, it is possible to understand the integral being conceived by Dewey, as well as the meaning which he attributes to reflective thought. According to him, this starts from a planning, a goal to be achieved. For Jay (1944), experience in the molds of Dewey would provide a return to the living organism: reflexive thinking would give meaning to human action, as it would be responsible for the organization and articulation of the elements arising from the imagination and sensitivity. Thus, by integrating and unifying all these elements, reflexive thinking itself also has an aesthetic aspect.

Dewey makes no distinction between artistic or scientific experiments because, for him, all experiences have rational content and planning. In painting, in the sciences and in philosophy, thinking is the result of the process of affection, something that occurs only in the correlation with the lived experiences. Of course, there is a big difference between a painter's thinking and a scientist's thinking, but both use rationality and emotion, reflection and creation to generate an idea or work. The distinction between them is that while the function of art is to express or reveal the genuine nature of things, that of science is to formulate and give instructions. Abstraction in science and art occurs in a different way. In science, it is for the sake of effective affirmation, whereas in art its end is the expressiveness of the object. Scientific and

artistic activity are intellectual, because the artist needs to think, see what has already been and what will be done.

The painter must consciously experience the effect of each brushstroke made or will not know what he is doing or where his work goes. Besides, he has to discern a particular relationship between acting and bearing in relation to the whole that he wants to produce. To learn such relationships is to think, one of the most demanding modes of thought (Dewey, 1934, p. 124).

Dewey does not ascribe to thought purely intellectual activities: both artistic creation requires thinking, and intellect is not confined to a specific type of verbal signs and words. "Thinking effectively, in terms of the relationships between qualities, is as severe a requirement of thought as thinking in terms of verbal and mathematical symbols" (Dewey, 1934, p. 125). In this sense, when we analyze this Deweyan conception of artistic experience that, similarly to the scientific one, is the result of a thought, containing elements of rationality, emotion, reflection and creation, again we can conceive the subject of educational practice from a holistic perspective. Thus, we move education from a single rationality unique to other rationalities that must also be strengthened and developed.

For Dewey, aesthetic experience is tied to everyday experiences. He criticizes the aesthetic theories that limit the work of art apart from the experience and context of whom produced it: "[...] when artistic objects are separated from the conditions of origin and functioning in experience, a wall is built around them, which almost make opaque its general significance, with which deals aesthetic theory" (Dewey, 1934, p. 60). The Deweyan concept of aesthetics is distinct from that of classical aesthetic theories.

Dewey criticizes Kant with regard to the question of pure reason. In his theory of knowledge, Kant puts in check the certainties that we have before a true knowledge, because, according to him, the certainty that there is true knowledge is false. This knowledge depends on a criterion that determines whether the object under evaluation corresponds, in fact, to a certain definition of truth. It is not possible to acquire true knowledge only by the evidences of true and intuitive certainties. Nor would the criterion of truth of knowledge be that of the facts themselves. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the value of truths of statements about things, since for that, a secure and guaranteed access to the things in

themselves would be indispensable, which would be the criterion for the verification of our judgments.

For Kant, the knowable would be acquired not by the things themselves, but by the way things appear to us, as the phenomena present themselves. Experience is understood by the philosopher as “[...] the knowledge of the object insofar as they affect our sensitivity and thus are given to us” (apud Rego, 2006, p. 169). The philosopher uses the *a priori* expression to designate that which does not depend on experience.

Kant (1999) states that the principles of the domain of knowledge and pure reason are *a priori*, that is, sensitivity presents us objects, provides us with intuitions. However, only knowledge engenders concepts, for whatever comes to us from the senses and produces sensation or intuition can house itself in *a priori* categories of understanding, independent of experience. In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant postulates principles *a priori* in relation to the faculty of desire. The will must act upon reason in order to determine the desire to obey the moral law. The moral law must be universal and necessary as the laws of nature, although the author considers that the contingency of habit and rules determines the categorical imperative: the principle of obedience to autonomous reason. Nevertheless, in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant addresses the issue of aesthetics. If, in the domain of morality, the purpose is resolved by the moral law itself, since the purpose of duty is to obey the moral law itself, the same cannot be extended to the purpose of art, nature or freedom. Although nature and art seem to obey an organized principle for an end, the meaning of this end is not given by knowledge. For the author, there is a universality presupposed in the judgment of taste, which cannot be given *a priori*. Kant states:

If you judge and appreciate objects only through concepts, you will lose all representation of beauty [...] Now there is something very strange here: while on the one hand, as for the taste of the senses, not only experience shows that its judgment has no universal value, and that on the contrary, each one is personally modest enough not to attribute to others such a universal assent to his own judgments [...] on the other hand, the taste for reflection [...] may, however, deem it possible to represent to itself the judgments that might require such universal assent (Kant, 1999, p. 8).

For Kant, there is no concept of beauty attached to a universal rule or law by which we could, by demonstration, arrive at the beautiful. In the same way, this judgment would not be bound to mere subjectivity or to the interest of the subject who judges. Taste would be the faculty of judging a priori the communicability of the feelings attached to a given representation (without the mediation of a concept), that is, the judgment of taste (apparently reflective, subjective, particular, individual) is an aesthetic, synthetic, and a priori. Kant affirms that the beauty is a universal without concept, a disinterested satisfaction, an endless end. For Kant, all interest corrupts the judgment of taste, for the beauty suffices for itself, it is not necessary to embellish it.

Dewey interprets Kantian philosophy as the creation of innumerable categories, whereby he establishes divisions in pure reason and connects the concept of beauty to contemplation, depriving it of any emotion or desire. For Dewey (1934), Kant influenced the aesthetic theories of the nineteenth century, because the artistic tendencies of this period emphasized reason, order in objective regularity

[...] it is, therefore, a theory peculiarly appropriate to a time when the 'representative' nature of art was especially pronounced, and in which the theme represented was of 'rational' nature - regular and recurrent elements and phases of nature (Dewey, 1934, p. 441, author's emphasis).

The secure basis of Dewey's aesthetic theories must be the fact that the aesthetic does not reach the experience from the outside to the inside, but it is part of the complete and unique experiences which, according to him, possess an artistic content and constitute aesthetic experiences. It emphasizes that in the English language, "[...] artistic refers primarily to the act of production, and aesthetic to that of perception and pleasure" (Dewey, 1934, p. 126), there being no term designating both processes. The act of production concerns the creation of a work of art which, according to him, may be fine arts, architecture, literature, theater or music. The consequence of the separation between the artistic and the aesthetic is that these terms tend to distance themselves, as if artistic creation did not involve aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment (or pleasure). For the author, the aesthetic experience contemplates all these aspects.

According to Barbosa (2011), in Dewey's conception, art reveals something deeper and meaningful in experiences that would otherwise be trivial, since artistic experience is not categorically different from other forms of experience. However, the author - among the various techniques that can sophisticate what aesthetic experience has as a common sense - chooses science and places art as a privileged language in the background, hierarchizing what he means by intelligent life. Hence, Jay also notes that Dewey, while striving to find a balance between the various types of experience, "[...] never declined the importance of science" (Jay, 1944, p. 164). This aspect, according to Jay, led several authors to misunderstand John Dewey's thinking, considering his philosophy only as an instrumentalist and scientific method and ignoring the aesthetic aspects.

Artistic and day-to-day experiences, when singular and therefore aesthetic, are composed of the same biological and psychological combinations, that is, organized energies, rhythm, order, and balance are part of the two forms of action. The purpose of art is to touch the human being, giving it sense and meaning, and this goal can be achieved by worldly experiences. It is precisely these aesthetic experiences that have a distinct quality and transform various experiences into one unique experience that we want to promote in the educational arena. Through this experience, education can go beyond its moralizing function, affecting individuals in the educational practice so that they can have ethical attitudes.

According to Barbosa (2011, p. 157), Dewey conceptualizes aesthetics as "[...] a diffuse quality that permeates the experience as a whole, which is completely different from the concept of art as the end point of a journey through various disciplines grouped around a theme". In this sense, therefore, aesthetics permeates the artistic experience as a whole, from its production to its appreciation. At the same time, Dewey seeks to rescue the aesthetic value of everyday experiences when they are in their most rudimentary forms.

[...] to understand the aesthetic in its supreme and approved forms, one must begin with it in its gross form, in the events and scenes that hold the watchful eye and attentive ear of man, arousing his interest and giving him pleasure in looking and hearing, the visions which captivate the crowd: the fast-moving fire engine truck, the machines that dig huge holes in the ground, the fly (Dewey, 1934, p. 62).



The aesthetic experience is in the most elementary feelings and emotions which, when we experience a simple situation, when we are in a certain situation, with our five senses open, touch and affect us. Such experiences are not superior to those of everyday life: they are part of life and our most rudimentary activities. To be overwhelmed by acute emotions and actually experience an aesthetic experience, we do not have to get out of our daily lives and visit a museum. After all, ordinary experiences provide more acute emotions than those experienced in a museum when one appreciates a work of fine art: "[...] even a crude experience, if it is genuine, is better able to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of the aesthetic experience than an object already separated from its context" (Dewey, 1934, p. 71).

In the interpretation of Jay (1944), Dewey sought to re-establish the power of art in worldly life, as he considered that all cognitive experiences have an aesthetic moment that unifies them. He also sought to find a balance between the reflexivity of philosophical thought and artistic expressiveness. Following this interpretation, we hope that education promotes this type of aesthetic experience as part of daily life, integrating it to the learning itself, to the curricular activities of the students.

When we deal with aesthetic experience in education and relate it to a condition, we are working with reflective thinking. We take into account not only its rational aspects, which relate to thinking skills, but also, and especially, a component that cannot yet be understood by words, but is responsible for actually triggering reflective processes. Such a component is the trigger of the unity of reasonfull of an aesthetic experience.

While the artistic experience implies the production of an object that aims to make an impact on the viewer that will appreciate it, aesthetic experience is not necessarily related to artistic objects, but to experiences that are meaningful and provide certain quality in thinking. It is important to point out that the author does not intend to diminish the importance of the fine arts, but to fill the gap between art and life, as if the work of art were autonomous, independent of everyday life, and had a decontextualized meaning. He even recognizes the distinction between useful and technological arts and fine arts, but explains that despite this distinction, fine art only attained this status because the artist who produced them "[...] lived and had very full experiences during the process of creation" (Dewey, 1934, p. 98). For art to have aesthetic value, it is

essential that it be contextualized, be part of a community and that the producer has experienced significant experiences.

Aesthetic experiences have their roots in the very biological process of the interaction of being with the environment in the struggle for survival. The nature of experience is determined by the special conditions of life.

The aesthetic value is in the rhythm of life itself, which sometimes presents us with situations of tension and instability and sometimes brings us satisfaction and stability. It is the balance between these opposing forces that gives us aesthetic experiences and feelings of full satisfaction, making daily life not a repetition. The vital balance stems from the rhythmic balance and harmony reached in part by a tension, a struggle, for "[...] it is the fact that the real world, the one in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, ruptures and reunions, the experience of the living being is liable to an aesthetic quality" (Dewey, 1934, p. 80).

Aesthetic quality would be characterized as an affection and, above all, as the ability of experiences to become a single experience. This quality of experience would be developed by education. Aesthetic experience and art are found in the very process of living, in the simple interaction with the environment and in action. However, what distinguishes irrational animals from human beings and, above all, what gives artistic content to human existence is rationality. What makes the actions intentional and objective is the awareness of the situation. Art would then be "[...] proof that man uses the materials and energies of nature with the intention of enlarging his own life, and that he does so according to the structure of his organism-brain, sensory organs, and muscular system" (Dewey, 1934, p. 93).

The very existence of art makes it possible for "[...] man to be able to consciously restore, and therefore, on the level of meaning, the union of sense, necessity, impulse and action that is characteristic of the living being" (Dewey, 1934, p. 96). It is an intellectual achievement in which man consciously unites action with sense, impulse and necessity, that is, "[...] it is the proof of the existence of a realizable union between material and ideal" (Dewey, 1934, p. 97).

When we think of art in education, we translate an attempt to make life brought to school, articulating sense, impulse, need and intellectual action and approaching that which is material to what is ideal. Life, in its

natural process, presents no dichotomy between things and their values, between practical activities and thought, between imagination and doing. It is the human being, with his cartesian way of thinking, that fragments the notion of experience and makes the actions, senses and sensations mechanically, static and fragmented. Dewey seeks to show that human experience is not fragmented and compartmentalized and that it is an organic whole. As he points out, feelings are connected to the senses: "The 'sense' embraces a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible and the sentimental, along with the sensual. It includes almost everything from the immediate physical shock" (Dewey, 1934, p. 88, author's emphasis). Again, we try to think of education in a non-fragmented but articulate and organic way, as the process of living itself.

The singular, non-fragmented experience involves action, emotion and intellect, that is, it involves the human being and his interaction with the environment in which he lives:

[...] experience is the result, the sign and reward of the interaction between the organism and environment which, when fully performed, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication. Since the sensory organs with the motor apparatus connected to them are the means of this participation, any and all invalidation of them, whether of a practical or theoretical nature, is at the same time an effect and cause of a narrowing and dulling of the life experience. The oppositions between mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all originate, fundamentally, in the fear of what life can bring (Dewey, 1934, p. 89).

Interaction, exchange and sharing with other beings and nature itself are extremely relevant to aesthetic experiences. Communication enables human beings to exchange experiences and meanings with other human beings. The aesthetic language and especially the art have the objective of communication. Education implies exchange, sharing and communication.

However, not all experience is singular and aesthetic. The singular experience occurs when "[...] the lived material makes the journey until its attainment" (Dewey, 1934, p. 109) and experience is integrated, connected to other experiences, in order to have an end, a conclusion, whether of a work, a game, a problem solved. The singular experience is a whole, it occurs in a flow that goes from one point to another, that is, it is a unity:

“[...] it is defined by the situations and episodes that we refer to spontaneously as ‘real experiences’ - those things that we say when recalling them: ‘this is what was experience’” (Dewey, 1934, p. 110, author’s emphasis).

### **Qualitative thinking and aesthetic experience**

The singular or aesthetic experience has an emotional content, that is, “[...] emotions are qualities of an experience that moves and alters” (Dewey, 1934, p. 119). But while “[...] experience is affective, there are no separate things in it, called emotions” (Dewey, 1934, p. 119). Emotions are intertwined with the movement of experience to an end, providing unity between the parts. The aesthetic experience provides an integration between creating and appreciating and an interrelationship of perception with emotions, with our senses: “[...] thus there is no seeing and hearing plus emotion in the perception. The perceived object or scene is entirely pierced by emotion. When an aroused emotion does not permeate the material perceived or thought is preliminary or pathological” (Dewey, 1934, p. 136). When fully lived, experience is rich in vitality, emotion and feeling, making it an active exchange with the world, an aesthetic experience.

Experience is singular when a given activity reaches its goal and is done with presence, attention and focus. For this reason, it has unity; the parts are integrated. It need not necessarily be a positive, pleasurable experience; it can be negative, an unpleasant experience, as long as it is meaningful, integral and generates growth. As Alexander points out, “[...] in experience, the conclusion is not only terminal or final, but a moment that brings a process of satisfaction: it is the result of a process guided by action that organizes and unifies experience” (1987, p. 199).

Concerning the educational experience, it can be said that it is not always positive; sometimes a negative experience fulfills the role of becoming unique, singular, with quality that generates growth, able to re-signify previous experiences.

Dewey does not distinguish between the intellectual, the practical, and the aesthetic, but he distinguishes from these the static and the monotonous, which, according to him, do not participate in aesthetic experiences that move and move towards their goal or outcome. The experiences are embodied and reconstructed: “[...] all experience is the result of the interaction between a living creature and some aspect of the

world in which it lives” (Dewey, 1934, p. 122). The reconstruction of experiences is provided by growth and educational experiences.

Aesthetic experiences transform a number of experiences into one meaningful experience, which is why it has quality, is educational, it will generate growth.

For the author, rationality originates instinctively, has an immediate and sensitive dimension; at the same time, immediate and sensitive experience can become rational, thanks to what he calls qualitative thinking. From this perspective, we think that artistic experience is an immediate and sensitive experience, prior to rational thought. Qualitative thinking complements reflective thinking.

According to Dewey, “[...] we cannot apprehend an idea, no organ of mediation, we cannot possess it in its full strength, while we do not feel it in affective and sensorial terms, as much as if it were an odor or a color” (Dewey, 1934, p. 235). In this perspective, we will try to approach the artistic reception, more specifically the cinematographic reception, from its strength and power, first felt in affective and sensorial terms.

The sensory dimension of our perceptive apparatus has an aesthetic quality that occurs in the connection between the senses, and not in isolation. There are no ‘simple’ or ‘pure’ qualities achieved by a single sense:

[...] a color seen is always qualified by implicit reactions of many organs, both those of the sympathetic system and those of touch. It's a funnel for all the energy invested, not its source. Colors are sumptuous and rich simply because a total organic resonance is deeply implicated in them (Dewey, 1934, p. 240).

The idea that there is an immediately felt experience, that is, the discussion of qualitative thinking was systematized by Dewey in two essays in 1930, *The Qualitative Thought* and *Affective Thought*, but also appears in his writings on art, inquiry, and aesthetics. In several passages in his book *Art as experience*, Dewey mentions qualitative thinking, as in the following passage:

[...] every time an idea loses its immediately felt quality, it ceases to be an idea and becomes an algebraic symbol, a mere stimulus to the execution of an operation, without the need for thinking [...] When there is a genuine art in scientific research and philosophical speculation, the thinker does not proceed

by the rules nor blindly, but by meanings that exist immediately as feelings endowed with a qualitative coloration (Dewey, 1934, p. 237).

The discussion of qualitative thinking lies in John Dewey's logical theory in which he refers to the thought that logic resumed in the formal sense of thought was not sufficient to discuss. It is indeterminate thought, a component of reflexive thinking not yet apprehended by reason, which allows it a certain freedom and an aesthetic sense that favor making ethical choices and that the role of education goes beyond its moralizing sense.

The purpose of Dewey's logic theory is to guide scientific research. For the author, it is a mistake to suppose that the object of knowledge is prior to the investigation that generates it; the research components do not have prior properties before they become part of this process.

According to Araújo, "[...] [Deweyan] research and its conclusions are made in continuity with organic behavior and the study of organic behavior excludes intuition or pure speculation" (2008, p. 43). For Dutra, Dewey's logical theory is not abstract theory in the sense of formal and deductive logical relations in statements, but "[...] a theory that reveals facts about the interaction of human beings with their environment" (2005, p. 169).

Anísio Teixeira, in the article Bases of the logical theory of Dewey, understands the Deweyan logic as an attempt to reconcile the old and the new, as a search of perspectives in a world in reconstruction. Dewey's concern is to restore unity, that is, to 'restore the divided house of human thought', in order to extend "[...] the generalization of the so-called scientific method not only to all areas of human knowledge but also to the usual and custom behavior of man" (Teixeira, 1955, p. 13).

Teixeira (1955) emphasizes logic as a process of reflective thinking, that is, the emphasis is on the process of acquiring knowledge. For him, Dewey's logic is "[...] a theory of intellectual life" (Teixeira, 1955, p. 7). Dewey exposes "[...] a natural, continuous science with the physical and biological theories" (Teixeira, 1955, p. 10).

From the logic of Dewey, "[...] life is, by its nature, a learning process: organic learning in living beings in general and intellectual learning among humans" (Teixeira, 1955, p. 19).

The same Deweyan logical method is applied to the problems of common sense and science, which would have no substantial differences,

apart from having any relation to each other. The differentiation between them resides in the language used, that is, the linguistic code of the common language and that of the sciences are different; words and phrases make sense because they are part of a collection of related senses which, in their representative function, make up a public or private code.

Qualitative thinking is related to the investigative process in the various areas of knowledge. After all, this thought supposes that the investigation implies an artistic creation, because all knowledge or thought arises from sensitive affection, the object of the understanding and human reason. Artistic knowledge differs in degree from scientific knowledge, among the various existing techniques.

The investigation would include the intellectuality and the relations between aesthetics and ethics, being impossible to disconnect these aspects from human action:

[...] it is not possible to divide vital experiences into emotional and intellectual practices, separating and contrasting their characteristics and properties. The emotional phase is in its totality, the 'intellectual' only demonstrates that the experience is significant, the 'practice' indicates that the organism is in interaction with the events and objects around it (Dewey, 1934, p. 61, author's emphasis).

Dewey criticizes the Platonic notion of eternal forms. For him, beauty and harmonious aesthetic forms emerge from sensory experiences and ordinary life situations, just as abstract knowledge and even theoretical research unleash the elements necessary for the investigation of a qualitative and non-cognitive situation. This situation has not yet reached the domain of articulated language, and cannot be expressed in words. It is qualitative, since, although it is an indeterminate situation, it is significant and has the potential to affect the subject.

The thought occurs in the same way as the artistic creation, when it is endowed with aesthetic harmony and parts that complement each other, forming a whole<sup>1</sup>. However, it occurs through the logical construction resulting from qualitative thinking, achieved by the existence of unique

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Dewey considers that, even when in its most rudimentary forms, art contains the promise of an aesthetic experience.

meanings that provide an immediate experience, first felt. The unique meaning differs from the meanings apprehended by articulated language as it reaches the individual without having reached the domain of reflection. It is something indeterminate and ineffable that will become determinate through reflection. Qualitative thinking moves along a path until becoming a reflexive element.

We affirm that reflective thinking is formed by qualitative thinking and rational thinking, encompassing both the sensitive and ineffable aspects of thought as well as articulated and logical thinking. Therefore, an idea or a thought, before becoming rational, affected the individual who conceives it.

Dewey begins his essay *Qualitative thought* saying:

The world in which we live immediately, in which we fight, sometimes we succeed, sometimes we are defeated, is primarily a qualitative world. The object of our action, the suffering, the glory, exists in its qualitative determination. This world constructs the characterized modes of thought from qualitative regulations. That is, the relationship we establish with reality is primarily immediate, aesthetic and qualitative. The object of our action exists in its qualitative determination. This world constructs the characterized modes of thought from qualitative regulations (Dewey, 1925-1953, p. 243).

When he mentions the qualitative regulations of the world that establish the way of thinking, the author is referring to the passage of qualitative thought, not determinate, to the thought that becomes determinate through reflection. That is, it is referring to reflective thinking. The contact we encounter with reality is, first of all, immediate and qualitative. In turn, the thought constructed by this world is qualitative before being reflective. Thought, therefore, is related to the objects involved in the problems and themes of living immediately felt. It has as consequence the action that relates to the own life and to the interaction of the subject with its environment, not being understood in isolation. It also refers to an educational process that involves growth.

Disagreeing with thinking in isolation, Dewey criticizes metaphysics, science, and logic over the qualitative attributes of objects. To metaphysics, by assigning characteristics to objects; to the physical sciences, because they consider the relation between the objects and their



characteristics; to epistemology, by stating that the qualities are subjective and physical, centering on the knowledge of the properties of external objects defined in non-qualitative terms; to logic, considering the characteristics of an object as determinate and fixed properties. Critics generally try to attribute qualitative features to objects apart from their interaction with the organism, as if objects are separate from thinking. Thought would be responsible for adding a designation to objects. Indeed, "[...] thoughts would be excluded from any participation in the determination of the subject matter of knowledge, confining it to establishing the results of knowledge already achieved in isolation" (Dewey, 1925-1953, p. 247).

For Dewey, thought is contextualized and, as mentioned, has an immediate component that is felt. If we resort to psychology, this thought will receive the denomination of feeling; that is, if defined in the language of psychology, it is affirmed that qualitative thinking is more felt than thought. It has an initially unspeakable meaning, with no linguistic significance captured in terms of sensation and emotion, because it has been apprehended without being caught by reflection. To illustrate qualitative thinking, first felt, which has unifying quality, the author presents the example of anger. When we feel anger, we are not aware of it, but feel the object of our anger in its qualitative, immediate and unique state; we feel its tone, its color, its situation. When we finally become aware of anger and can name it, it means that it has reached the universe of discourse, and therefore our reflection, no longer being in its raw, immediate state.

This immediate and prior experience of cognitive thinking is called 'qualitative thinking'. It is an indeterminate experience and has no linguistic meaning, cannot be expressed in words, but only felt in its ineffability: "[...] language does not fail as a consequence of thought, but because no verbal symbol can be fair with the completeness and richness of qualitative thinking" (Dewey, 1925-1953, p. 250). The qualitative character of this thought derives from aesthetic experience or, more precisely, from the aesthetic quality of experience, since it is responsible for assigning a meaning that thought does not possess.

Such a meaning given by experience - which thought does not possess - would trigger reflective thinking. In this case, when the thought reaches reflexivity, there will be a certain freedom for the individual to

take ethical actions, so that his educational process goes beyond morality and, perhaps, so that he can re-signify his own life and values.

Linked to the Greek word *aesthesis*, which designates the faculty of feeling or understanding by the senses, aesthetic experience covers any and all experience that significantly affects the individual. This experience originates in affection, is more indeterminate, but has quality and meaning. Quality means that experience is unique and transforms various experiences into a single, significant one that generates growth in the individual and causes him to find in it a meaning, though not named, nor enunciated.

Dewey uses art to explain how qualitative thinking occurs: art provides the individual with qualitatively understood experiences. Some works are appreciated aesthetically, that is, many people experience, in front of a work, acute and immediate experiences because such work has its own qualities, a whole that distinguishes it from others, that is, its properties are not isolated. The quality of the whole permeates, affects and controls every detail, composing a unity.

The unity offered by this work of art can be lived in other experiences, for the author, aesthetic experiences are not exclusive to the artistic medium: they occur in everyday experiences, which relate to their quality. Aesthetic experiences provide qualitative thinking and are more felt than thought in reflective terms. They are pre-cognitive and are characterized by the transformation of several experiences into a single one. The first contact with the world has not yet gone through the elaboration of cognition; it would be the first stage of any thought or investigative process, “[...] because every thought in any area begins with an unanalyzed whole” (Dewey, 1925-1953, p. 251).

Unprocessed thinking would become problematic; it would unleash a formulated problem. Although the postulation of a clear problem implies articulated thinking, it arises from a problematic situation not yet organized in logical terms: the problem is experienced before it is formulated and has a quality arising immediately from the situation. This thought arises from an intuition, is relatively dubious and inarticulate, and yet penetrating. Though not expressed in definite ideas, in a rational and well-justified way, it is deeply correct, as well as possessing unique underlying qualities. Rationality and reflection have the role of elaborating this intuition from aesthetic experience.

Based on the concepts worked on in this article, we affirm that it is possible to understand the artistic experience of John Dewey in two ways. One of them, the most common interpretation, only considers the reception of the artistic experience through logic and a certain philosophical instrumentalism. The second interpretation of John Dewey's artistic experience seeks to understand the indeterminacy of the artistic experience. In this sense, we consider that the Deweyan conception of art is possible to be thought of in education, because its meaning is in the aesthetic experience that is not only rational, but also qualitative.

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## Nota

<sup>1</sup> P.L. Angerami is responsible for the conception, design, analysis and interpretation of the data; writing of the manuscript, critical revision of the content and approval of this final version.

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