

Respect, resistance, and the educative potential of vocational education: Dewey's enduring relevance for the individual, the workplace, and society

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Introduction

John Dewey was born four years after the publication in 1855 of the first edition of Walt Whitman's radical poetic masterpiece, *Leaves of Grass*, which contains a section entitled 'A Song for Occupations'. In that section, Whitman wrote:

A song for occupations!
In the labor of engines and the labor of the fields I find
The developments, and find the eternal meanings.
Workmen and Workwomen! ...
Is it you then that thought yourself less?
Is it you that thought the President greater than you?
Or the rich better off than you? Or the education wider than you?
Souls of men and women! It is not you I call unseen, unheard, untouchable and
untouching ...
I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns.

Writing at a time of political crisis in America in the run up to the Civil War, Whitman believed that poetry had an essential role to play in the protection and development of American democracy and the Union (Nussbaum, 2011; see also Rorty, 1998). In publicly valorizing working people and their contributions to society, the 'Song of Occupations' is imbued with Whitman's aim to make visible the aesthetic value of everyday life, including work and the democratic potential of everyday urban encounters, including when people are travelling to and from work. The latter is most memorably portrayed in another section called 'Crossing Brooklyn Bridge'. As Nussbaum argues, *Leaves of Grass* as a whole expresses Whitman's philosophy: 'Seeing eternity in men and women entails working for a society that treats every one of them as an end, and none as a mere tool for the ends of others' (*ibid*: 100). Thus, by fusing politics and aesthetics, Whitman, according to the co-founder of American pragmatism, William James, can 'change the usual standards of human value' and facilitate greater understanding between people from different walks of life, or as he put it, the merging of 'alien lives' (cited in Allison, 2002: 19).

Dewey acknowledged his debt to Whitman in 1927 when he wrote: 'Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion. It had its seer in Walt Whitman. It will have its consummation when free social inquiry is indissolubly wedded to the art of full and moving communication' (cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998: 307). In this chapter, I argue that vocational education can and should be conceived as part of the democratic project Whitman and Dewey advanced. Moreover, I argue that vocational education's continued vulnerable status in the United Kingdom (UK) is in itself a

consequence of three interconnected and longstanding problems: the disrespect for, and lack of visibility of, the expertise involved in what are regarded as ‘ordinary jobs’, the failure to exploit the educative potential of vocational education to ensure all young people can continue to develop their capabilities beyond school, and the undemocratic nature of UK workplaces and employer ambivalence towards workforce development.

In advancing this argument, I am mindful of other continuities recast for each generation, most notably of what Brown and Scase (1991) termed ‘poor work’ and the deep-rooted inequalities in labour markets in the UK, as well as worldwide (Berg, 2015; Lloyd *et al.*, 2008). The number of people in the UK on ‘zero hours’ contracts rose in 2015 to 744,000 (ONS, 2015), whilst many more – Standing’s (2011) ‘precariat’ – earn their living through a series of short-term jobs and without the safety net of the employment and social welfare protection associated with occupational stability. Behind these statistics lie the damaging long-term ‘scarring’ effects of underemployment, particularly among young people (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). From analysis of survey data of employees in advanced economies, Green (2006) shows that whilst the skill requirements of many jobs have increased, so too has the intensification of work effort. This has resulted in decreased levels of job satisfaction and a reduction in the amount of discretion employees have to manage and influence their work tasks (Brown *et al.*, 2011).

Working – and non-working – life has many dark sides. Yet it also provides opportunities for immense satisfaction and civic association, and, importantly, for resistance and personal growth. In her classic studies of mental health from the late 1950s onwards, the social psychologist Marie Jahoda (1982) identified what she termed the five ‘latent functions’ of employment: the imposition of a time structure for the day, the opportunity to engage in a collective purpose with goals beyond the individual’s own concerns, the means to participate in and contribute to social contacts beyond the domestic realm of family and friends, a vehicle for providing the individual with an acknowledged status and, relatedly, for developing an identity, and the discipline of daily activity and the means to use and further develop skills and knowledge. Such functions were distinct from the ‘manifest functions’ of employment – namely, the production of goods and services and the means to earn a living. Thus employment, Jahoda argued, was important for well-being, in contrast to unemployment. In that sense, Jahoda echoes Dewey’s assertion that through the activity of work we forge our individual and social identities, and shape as well as contribute to collective well-being (for a recent application of Jahoda’s ideas, see Paul and Batinic 2010). Dewey (1966: 206) stressed, of course, that the work itself had to have meaning, otherwise it ‘... becomes constrained labor when the consequences are outside of the activity as an end to which activity is merely a means’. It is vital, therefore, to make a strong connection between education and work to enable people to develop the capacity to challenge their place in, and the construction of, the world of work and society more broadly.

Dewey’s liberal vocational education

Dewey’s conception of vocational education is rooted within his overall philosophy of education: ‘the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself’ (cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998: 229). Dewey was not against the formal teaching of disciplinary and specialist knowledge. He stressed that ‘without such formal education, it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society. It also opens a way to a

kind of experience which would not be accessible to the young, if they were left to pick up their training in informal association with others ...' (*ibid*: 8). The danger, as Dewey saw it, lay in focusing only on material that 'exists in a world by itself, unassimilated to ordinary customs of thought and expression' (*ibid*). He was concerned, therefore, to challenge what he called 'the ordinary notion of education: the notion which ignores its social necessity and its identity with all human association that affects conscious life, and which identifies it with imparting information about remote matters and the conveying of learning through verbal signs: the acquisition of literacy' (*ibid*: 9).

To create a more harmonious balance whereby curriculum content and pedagogical approaches could afford opportunities for children to develop the problem solving and communication skills necessary throughout life, Dewey proposed the concept of 'occupations'. He said that 'an occupation is a continuous activity having a purpose' (cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998: 309). The educational significance, he argued, was that occupations 'may typify social situations' and relate to human beings' fundamental concerns about 'food, shelter, clothing, household furnishings, and the appliances connected with production, exchange and consumption'. (*ibid*: 199). Here, as we noted earlier with reference to Whitman, we see the centrality of the aesthetic dimension to human life. Dewey continues that by 'representing both the necessities of life and the adornments with which the necessities have been clothed, they tap instincts at a deep level; they are saturated with facts and principles having a social quality' (*ibid*: 200). Dewey was quick to demolish the charge that such occupational activities as gardening, weaving, cooking, and woodwork had a 'merely bread and butter value' (*ibid*). He explained:

Gardening, for example, need not be taught either for the sake of preparing future gardeners, or as an agreeable way of passing the time. It affords an avenue of approach to knowledge ... There is nothing in the elementary study of botany which cannot be introduced in a vital way in connection with caring for the growth of seeds. (*ibid*)

Dewey's emphasis on the educative potential of vocational education put him at odds with his own government and those who advocated the introduction in the United States of a separately administered and narrowly conceived system of vocational training, also known as the manual training movement (DeFalco, 2010; Lewis, 2007). In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Hughes Act to provide federal funding for vocational training for so-called non-academic students in schools and post-school programmes for young people making their transition from school to work (for a critique see Hyslop-Margison, 2000). Dewey conducted a public debate in the magazine *The New Republic* with the most influential advocate of the 'social efficiency' movement, David Snedden (see Labaree, 2010 for a detailed review). Snedden was State Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts and then Professor of Education at Columbia University's Teachers' College. He called for a stratified school system to serve the needs of the increasingly stratified layers of the American economy and society in the twentieth century. He borrowed from the scientific management theories developed by F. W. Taylor (Taylorism) to propose that the curriculum should not be based on textbooks, but broken down into specific units of instruction, including behavioural instruction.

Snedden's ideas and those of his 'social efficiency' group foreshadowed the ideas of Gilbert Jessup and his civil service colleagues at the then Employment Department in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They argued for and subsequently developed a competence-based

approach to vocational education and training (Raggatt and Williams, 1999; Jessup, 1991). Both Snedden and Dewey – and later Jessup – are seen as educational ‘progressives’ in that they set out to challenge the traditional school curriculum and the way schools were organized. Their philosophies, however, are very different. Snedden and Jessup can be situated in the camp David Tyack (1974) termed the ‘administrative progressives’, in contrast to Dewey whom Tyack termed a ‘pedagogical progressive’. In his counterblasts to Snedden, Dewey railed against what he regarded as an educational philosophy based on social predestination. He argued:

To split the system, and give to others less fortunately situated an education conceived mainly as specific trade preparation, is to treat schools as an agency for transferring the older division of labor and leisure, culture and service, mind and body, directed and directive class, into a society nominally democratic ... But an education which acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation would include instruction in the historic background of present conditions; training in science to give intelligence and initiative in dealing with material and agencies of production; and the study of economics, civics and politics to bring the future workers in touch with the problems of the day ... Above all, it would train power of re-adaptation to changing conditions that future workers would not become blindly subject to a fate imposed upon them. (Dewey, 1966: 318)

The final sentence of this quotation could be seen as an early formulation of what would later be called ‘lifelong learning’. Yet as Labaree (2010: 182) reminds us, Dewey lost because Snedden was the ‘right man in the right place wielding the right idea for his times’. Again, there is a direct parallel with Jessup in the UK.

Sennett (2008: 287) notes that Dewey has been ‘unfairly blamed for the sins of touchy-feely progressive education’. Dewey’s advocacy of experience and play as central to the educational process certainly influenced the development of ‘experiential learning’ and ‘reflective learning’, which have had a major impact on adult education and training. Sennett (*ibid*) and Miettinen (2000) particularly, make a strong counter argument by situating Dewey’s concept of experience within the contested context of the social world, including the workplace. As the earlier quotation stresses, Dewey wanted people to be educated so they could resist and challenge their circumstances, not simply reflect on how they might do a better job or be a better learner. He made this very clear in two articles he published in 1915, in response to Snedden, in *The New Republic*. He did not want vocational education, or any form of education, to adapt workers to the existing industrial regime, for, he said: ‘I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that.’ Rather, he strove for ‘a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it’ (Dewey, 1915 – cited in Labaree, 2010: 9).

Whilst Young (2008: 146) acknowledges the strength of Dewey’s emphasis on the situated character of knowledge, he places him within a broader critique of what he terms ‘process-based approaches’. These, he argues ‘fail to distinguish between the ‘degree of situatedness’ of different types of knowledge’. Although he is not writing about Dewey, Schwalbe (2010) has a related concern to Young about using concepts such as skill and knowledge in an undifferentiated way because occupational activities are incredibly varied in nature. From a different perspective, Guile (2011: 82) is concerned that in forming a ‘naturalistic conception of our relation with the world’, Dewey omits to consider ‘our mediated relation to the world’ and the way in which mind and body are ‘constituted culturally and historically through

human activity'. Such critiques trouble what might be regarded as an overly positive discussion of Dewey's ideas in this chapter. I would argue, however, that Dewey's continuing relevance for vocational education lies in his understanding that through a rigorous educational process, young people and adults are given the tools and motivation to distinguish between the types of knowledge they encounter and use, and to find in their domestic and work activity both aesthetic satisfaction and historical connections.

Democracy at and for work

Dewey argued that vocational education helps people consider what kind of lives they want to lead and identify the type of skills and knowledge they might require to achieve their goals. He saw participation in vocational education as an important means for all individuals to connect their interests and abilities with the world around them. For the contemporary political theorist Alan Ryan (1999: 104), the radical aspect of Dewey's approach to vocational education is that 'he makes practice the basis of a liberal education' (see also Pring, 1993). Although Dewey wrote mainly about vocational education as part of compulsory schooling, he continually emphasizes that its purpose, as with all forms of education, is to affect the way society, including what he referred to as the industrial regime, is organized. Hence his ideas are relevant for considering the nature and purpose of vocational education across the course of life. In this section, I want to consider the implications of his ideas for vocational education beyond school and, in particular, training in the workplace.

From initial skill formation through to advanced forms of occupational practice, vocational education enters people's lives at different points and for different purposes. In many European countries, apprenticeship is the main institution within their initial education and training systems. Apprenticeship is an internationally understood model of learning – the term is still used in occupational fields as diverse as medicine, journalism, music, engineering, and hairdressing – so in certain countries it has meaning, both real and metaphorical, beyond its institutional status (see Fuller and Unwin, 2013a; 2014). Its purpose is to enable the apprentice to develop the expertise they require to become a full member of an occupational community. This necessarily involves wider conversations about the aesthetic and moral dimensions of working life. Hence, the apprenticeship model of learning is imbued with Dewey's concept of 'collateral learning', which he outlined in his 1938 lecture *Education and Experience*, whereby concepts, practices, and experiences are drawn on long after the formal training period has finished (Dewey, 1997).

In countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, which are regarded as having particularly robust apprenticeships, the concept of occupation is central because it transcends the more limited and temporal concept of a job, the basis of apprenticeship in the UK (see Fuller and Unwin, 2013b). In Germany, this is encapsulated in the concept of *Beruf* to mean both the occupational field and the journey the apprentice takes to become both an expert and a responsible and engaged citizen. Importantly, *Beruf* covers all occupations, including professions. Hence a doctor has a *Beruf* in the same way as a carpenter. It is perhaps surprising, then, to find that Dewey used the term 'apprenticeship' in a negative way to describe the 'utilitarian' nature of the education offered to people in America in the past when schools concentrated on a basic level of reading, writing, and arithmetic suited to mass employment (Dewey, 1966: 312). Yet Dewey was writing from within and seeking to challenge the Anglo-American tradition, with its strongly demarcated

definition of ‘skills’: elite skills obtained through academic education, high-level craft/technical skills, and general skills that could be applied across a wide range of ‘unskilled’ or ‘low-skilled’ jobs.

Dewey was, of course, right in the sense that much of what happens within an apprenticeship, and vocational education and training more generally, will be determined and hence limited by the requirements of an employer (or historically a ‘master’), unless they are situated within occupationally-based frameworks designed and delivered through collective arrangements that involve the state, employers, employee representative bodies – trade unions or works councils – and vocational educators. At the heart of such an approach is a commitment to a shared purpose whose outcomes will benefit all parties: sustainability of the specific work organization (be it public or private sector), maintenance of standards and the induction of new members into an occupational field, formalized opportunities for older workers to pass on their skills and knowledge, and the continuing education of young people as active citizens within the workplace and society. This does not mean, however, that such collective arrangements are untroubled by disagreements. Rather, as Busemeyer and Trampusch (2012: 34) explain, they regularly lead to ‘conflictual renegotiations and transformations of institutional arrangements’ and, as a consequence, we must be wary of making assumptions about the stability of any system. Instead we need to be ready at all times to work with the ‘dynamic, partly contingent, and fundamentally political nature of skill formation processes’ (*ibid*: 4).

From a political economy perspective, we cannot therefore treat vocational education, and skill formation more broadly, in isolation from the political, economic, and historical features that characterize individual countries. Even at a time of intense economic globalization, nation states still have a powerful role to play in determining the nature of their vocational education and skill formation systems. There is not the space here to discuss the complex reasons why these systems vary from one country to another, but a key feature of the collective system approach seems to be a shared commitment by the state, employers, and society more generally. In other words, skill formation – and we should include here skill utilization – is a matter of importance for everyone, not just employers or individuals.

A shared commitment cannot be dictated through state policies or mobilized through politicians giving rhetorical speeches. It has to be embedded throughout the institutions involved, including workplaces. There is a substantial literature on the historical inadequacies of the way UK workplaces are managed and the debilitating effect of the short-termism dictated by shareholders and the financial institutions in the City of London (Hutton, 1995). In 17 of the EU’s 28 member states, employees have the right to be represented at Board level, but not in the UK, which has one of the worst records in Europe for involving employees in decision-making – in both the public as well as private sector – and providing formal channels for them to exert influence (Lawrence and McNeil, 2014). The percentage of the workforce that has its pay and conditions set by collective bargaining is declining – it is currently at 29 per cent, but only 16 per cent in the private sector. This compares with Germany at 61 per cent, the Netherlands at 81 per cent, Denmark at 80 per cent, Sweden at 88 per cent, and France at a staggering 97.7 per cent.

The UK does, of course, have some extremely well-managed companies and public sector organizations capable of organizing work and affording employees discretion to make judgements and plan, execute, and evaluate their work. Importantly, they demonstrate to their employees that they trust their judgements. These are the ingredients for creating what Alison

Fuller and I have termed ‘expansive workplace learning environments’, which fully utilize and continue to develop employee knowledge and skills at all levels (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Felstead *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, knowledge and skills in what we termed ‘restrictive workplace learning environments’ are not as widely distributed and employee involvement is more limited. Expansive workplaces are found in all shapes and sizes across the public and private sectors. Within very large organizations, including educational institutions, it is possible to have both expansive and restrictive workplaces – departments or sections – under the same roof (Fuller *et al.*, 2005). From the perspective of initial training, expansive workplaces recognize and support the important dual identity of trainees – whether they are apprentices, interns, or older workers participating in an upskilling or retraining programme – as workers and learners.

Many workplaces struggle to create these conditions because their managers and employees have not experienced good-quality vocational education and training and hence cannot model the type of workforce development found in expansive workplaces. The state offers them ‘training solutions’ rather than the substantive business support and advice they need to enable them to analyze the type of workforce development they require to strengthen their businesses. The vicious circle of the low-skills equilibrium continues to reproduce itself and it is strong enough to withstand the short-lived interventions, which successive generations of policymakers hope will bring about a ‘skills revolution’.

The question, therefore, is how do we create in the UK the conditions for the type of vocational education Dewey envisioned?

Reviewing UK vocational education through a Deweyan lens

Dewey would find much that resonated with his utilitarian view of apprenticeship if he visited the UK today. Furthermore, he would see the dominance of a restrictive approach to both apprenticeship and vocational education very much geared to adapting young people and adults to the industrial regime, albeit with some notable exceptions (Unwin, 2004; Fuller and Unwin, 2003). It is important to stress here that the UK does have many examples of high-quality vocational education programmes, some of which are regularly visited by policymakers and practitioners from other countries. Their quality and resilience can arise for a number of reasons. First, it can be a result of long-standing partnerships between vocational teachers and trainers in colleges and other types of training providers. In engineering, a form of collective arrangement thrives through the remaining employer-led Group Training Associations (GTAs), which were originally established following the 1964 Industrial Training Act. Second, some vocational programmes – including apprenticeships – lead to qualifications that have a high currency in the labour market, including some that also provide a ‘licence to practise’ (e.g. dental technologists). Third, some programmes serve what have become ‘niche’ occupations due to the growth in demand for handmade goods (e.g. furniture and handbags). Finally, there are programmes that do not necessarily fit into these categories, but which reflect to some extent Dewey’s criteria for good-quality and outward-looking vocational education. Their quality results from teachers and trainers who break out of the straightjacket of the restrictive frameworks in which they are expected to work and change the rules. Given that vocational education in the UK has to operate within a market economy but is at the same time measured by outcomes set by the state, we have the curious reality of allowing a thousand flowers to bloom but no strategy for nurturing the most fruitful and colourful areas of the garden.

Vocational education in the UK, therefore, continues to be both a conundrum and a fertile playground for policymakers – of all political persuasions – to dream up endless initiatives (see inter alia Keep 2006). Politicians make speeches about the need to raise the status of vocational education so it can offer something to those young people who, in their terms, form the ‘forgotten’ and, even worse, ‘bottom 50 per cent’ of each year’s post-compulsory cohort because they sit outside the safe and preferred academic route that leads to higher education. They have even resorted to advocating the resurrection of the medieval guilds. As Bill Bailey and I have argued, the history of both vocational education and continuation education and training for young people who leave school at the end of the compulsory phase has been and continues to be defined by voluntarism (Bailey and Unwin, 2014; see also Unwin, 2010). This is partly a social class problem, but the continued fallacy that only certain jobs involve cerebral skills and knowledge crosses party political lines. There are those on the Left who regard vocational education as problematic because they fear it might trap young people in what they see as low-end jobs and limit their ‘horizons for action’. On the other hand, there are those on the Right who want to expand vocational education, but along the segregated lines that Snedden and his social efficiency colleagues would applaud.

In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams reminded us how, up to the eighteenth century the word ‘art’ meant ‘skill’. From that point, however, it began to be associated much more with the ‘arts’ – as in painting and sculpture – so that the term ‘artist’ became distinguished from the term ‘artisan’ and the emphasis on skill was replaced by an emphasis on ‘sensitivity’. As a consequence, art and design usually sits in a separate, more gilded educational box to other types of vocational education and training (VET).

From the time of the Industrial Revolution, which cemented the belief that most jobs required little beyond rudimentary on-the-job training, to the more recent pronouncements that the country is now a ‘knowledge economy’, we are still struggling to create a stable, well-functioning, and properly resourced VET infrastructure underpinned by a shared sense of purpose. Dewey’s vision of the broader educative potential of VET to unlock the joy and relevance of studying such subjects as aesthetics, history, literature, geography, politics, and science has been largely ignored. As the campaigners for adult education continue to stress, there is a huge, unquenched thirst for learning in the population. And many individuals seek their own ways to craft their jobs into something meaningful in order to utilize and expand their knowledge and skills.

Anyone participating in the good-quality provision I have mentioned knows they are gaining qualifications that have both educational and labour market currency. Yet this provision exists in a parallel world to the cash-strapped, inconsistent, and unambitious places where many young people and adults encounter vocational education. In this world, policymakers seek continuous ‘reform’, expect vocational education to solve educational, social, and economic problems, and parrot the mantra that everything would be well if only VET was ‘employer-led’ or even ‘employer-owned’. Individuals entering this jungle find programmes, including apprenticeships, of different lengths and levels, some with a work-based element and some not, leading to a bewildering array of qualifications whose exchange value varies even at the same level. This is a problem for adults who want to acquire new skills or upgrade their skills, but we should be particularly concerned about young people. In those European countries with strong VET systems, young people embark on nationally consistent VET programmes and apprenticeships, all lasting at least three years and involving both general education and vocational training. We know that inequalities in adult skills in England are

high in comparison to other OECD countries. Green *et al.*'s (2015) analysis of data from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) shows that skill gaps found at age 15 close more substantially over the lifecourse in countries with strong vocational education and apprenticeship systems.

In England, due to the policies of the previous Labour Government and continued by both the Coalition and the Conservatives, apprenticeship has become a 'brand', a government-designed product to be piled high and sold cheap. Alison Fuller and I have long argued that apprenticeship is a litmus test for the state of vocational education and, importantly, the economy. As our research has shown, apprenticeship has been distorted to the extent that it now includes subsidizing employers – in both the public and private sector – to convert existing employees into 'apprentices' and accrediting them for skills they have already acquired (Fuller *et al.*, 2015). This helps to explain why over 40 per cent of all apprentices are aged 25 and over – with 6 per cent aged 50 plus – and why most apprentices are found in sectors such as health and social care and hospitality. It has been possible to reduce apprenticeship to a 'brand' that includes the accreditation of existing skills because government funding is linked to the achievement of competence-based qualifications. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, these qualifications were developed by a group of civil servants who wanted to challenge the educational status quo. Their radical proposal was that the assessment process should be decoupled from the learning process so that an individual who could already show they were 'competent' according to the specifications of a qualification could have their skills and knowledge accredited. Furthermore, for Jessup and colleagues this meant that qualifications could be attained through assessment in the workplace, rather than through tests and examinations in an educational institution.

Alison Fuller and I are not arguing that provision should not be made for adults to acquire qualifications. Given the extended nature of working life because of the removal of mandatory retirement, people's need to continue earning money and, in some cases, the desire to carry on working, provision for good-quality, accredited adult training is very important. Rather, we are concerned to highlight the crucial difference between the accreditation of existing skills and the concept of apprenticeship as a model of learning designed to develop occupational knowledge and expertise over time.

Conclusion

John Dewey developed his philosophy of education at a time of economic and political turmoil in America. He was particularly concerned with challenging the status quo with regard to schooling. As I have tried to argue in this chapter, however, his ideas about vocational education as a means for individuals to find their way in life and build the capabilities they will need to both resist and challenge power and inequity are as powerful today as they were in the first half of the twentieth century. That he lost the battle of his time to the 'administrative progressives' is another reason to consider his relevance for the UK's approach to vocational education today. We can still continue to critique Dewey's ideas, but we should hold up his vision as a mirror through which to evaluate our current education and training systems.

To begin to take a Deweyan approach in the UK, we have to join up the dots. The UK economy has long-standing skill shortages, gaps, and mismatches. At the same time, many

workplaces underutilize employees' skills and the average training volume per worker has declined by about a half between 1997 and 2012, with the biggest decline being among young workers, workers in the private sector, and among workers with the lowest educational attainment (Green *et al.*, 2013). This is in contradistinction to the policymakers' cry that vocational education does not provide what employers want. To start to take VET and apprenticeship seriously, we need to refashion the way we conceptualize the relationship between education and work so it is less oppositional and more relational. Many employers will need support to play their part. Vocational teachers and trainers will themselves need access to high-quality professional development. But, as Dewey stressed, the driver for vocational education should not just be the economy. Developing a sense of the dynamism of the modern workplace as well as a respect for, and interest in, the different types of skill and knowledge involved in all forms of work should be part of every child's education. A vocationally rich society would be a fairer society, one in which everyone's capabilities are valued, celebrated, and enhanced.

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