

**Black Mountain College.****Art, Education, and a Form of Life****Lyubov Bugaeva**

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1       **“The democratic man, we said, must be an artist” (John Andrew Rice)**

2       **In 1940 John Dewey called Black Mountain College “a living example of democracy in**  
**action” standing “at the very ‘grass roots’ of a democratic way of life” (Dewey to Dreier,**  
3       **18 July 1940). Falling back on Dewey’s educational ideas and theory of art, John**  
**Andrew Rice, the founder of the College, stated, “the democratic man [...] must be an**  
4       **artist. The integrity [...] of the democratic man was the integrity of the artist, an integ-**  
**egrity of relationship.” Similarly, Josef Albers, the Bauhaus artist who in 1933 fled from**  
**Germany and joined the College, professed later that the principal aim of Black Moun-**  
**tain College was to “to educate a student as a person and as a citizen.” What connects**  
**the notions of democracy, education, and the arts? To what extent is Dewey’s version**  
**of pragmatism, known as instrumentalism, applicable to education in the arts? And**  
**finally, what makes Black Mountain College a revolutionary experiment in education,**  
**the importance and memory of which considerably outlast its less than a quarter of a**  
**century (1933 - 1957) existence?**

**Education as experience**

**Pragmatist ideas that were shaped and employed in unique practices of teaching and**  
**organizing students’ life in Black Mountain College came from several sources - direct-**  
**ly from John Dewey’s writings, and indirectly channeled through John Andrew Rice**  
**and Josef Albers. In the 1930s John Dewey visited the College on several occasions.**  
**In 1936 he was elected a member of the Advisory Council of Black Mountain College**  
**and served for three years, and in 1939 was re-elected for the next term. The library**  
**comprised many of Dewey’s writings donated by the author during his visits. Dewey**  
**attended classes, advised on the curriculum, and enjoyed formal and informal com-**  
**munication with students and faculty, who had meals and extracurricular activities**  
**together. In a letter to Myrtle B. McGraw, a psychologist and researcher in child devel-**  
**opment as well as his friend and correspondent, Dewey reflected on the educational**

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1       Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 328.

2       Letters to and from Dewey are quoted from *The Correspondence of John Dewey*, electronic edition (Dewey 2008).

3       Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 328.

4       Kurtz 1944, p. 3.

model at Black Mountain College, which was drastically different from others with a fixed or close to fixed curriculum that liberal arts colleges usually had at the time. Despite some reservations about the freedom the students had, Dewey was rather optimistic in his account of the environment created at the College:

“The new students, twenty or so are younger than the former ones, just out of high school mostly, and I am trying to find out how they fit in but don’t know yet; I am wondering how they react to the seeming lack of pressure to do “school work”. But the young people are conclusive evidence how much education is derivable from a[s]sociation with intelligent people whether they do much of what is called work or not.” (Dewey to McGraw, 8 March 1936).

In contrast, Dewey’s friend Albert Barnes, an art collector and educator, had doubts about Black Mountain College; in his view, freedom in selecting nearly every course did not lead to better outcomes but produced chaos. Discussing it with Dewey, Barnes expressed serious concerns about the methods of teaching, primarily about the role of the art class instructor:

“From my observations of the course in operation I felt that there was a confusion between activity on the part of the student and the results of the activity, judged in the terms of educational values. There could be no question that the people in the art class were up on their toes, but equally unquestionable is the fact that their activities were not directed in an intelligent way, but were led by the imposition of the personality of the teacher. [...] His ideas, his methods, as embodied in both his teaching and in his own paintings, represent to me a very low order of academism. In short, in the development of the human faculties, I see very little advantage in keeping them active, unless the activities are either intelligently guided or the student has within himself the powers of selection to lead his activities into fruitful and intelligent channels.” (Barnes to Dewey, 25 March 1936).

However, Dewey, who closely followed the ups and downs of the college, stayed positive; he thought of Black Mountain College as a critical institution “in the long run interests of democracy” and of its “work and life” as a path to a “democratic way of life” (Dewey to Dreier, 18 July 1940). When the College experienced a hardship, Dewey remarked: “No matter how the present crisis comes out the need for the kind of work the

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5 In correspondence with Ted Dreier, a college treasurer, and Robert Wunsch, a lecturer in literature and drama, Dewey showed knowledge of the difficulties that the College experienced from time to time. Thus, Dewey writes to Dreier, “I hope, earnestly, that your efforts to get adequate support for Black Mountain College will be successful” (Dewey to Dreier, 18 July 1940); Dewey writes to Wunsch, “naturally sorry to hear of the College’s troubles” (Dewey to Wunsch, 19 August 1944).

College does is imperative in the long run interests of democracy” (Dewey to Dreier, 18 July 1940). Rice in his memoirs portrayed Dewey as an attentive listener who “had respect for the process of learning,” as a person who asked questions rather than provide standard answers. Besides, Dewey was more than an honorable visitor; his writings were the principal source of inspiration for the Black Mountain College teachers. Several key concepts of Dewey’s pragmatism resonate in the methods and ideas of the College’s educational model, above all the concepts of experience and of inquiry based on the organism-environment interaction and of inquiry.

In 1896, Dewey wrote a short but important article, “*The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology*” (1896), where he argued against the conception of the reflex arc, common in psychology at the end of the 19th century. The reflex arc conception treats sensory stimulus, central connections, and motor responses as separate entities (sensation – idea – movement), while for Dewey such separation is an erroneous evocation of the mind / body distinction. Assuming the continuity of body and consciousness, he argues for the wholeness of experience. For instance, in the situation when the child sees the candle-flame, reaches for it and withdraws his hand when the fingers are burnt, Dewey states, “the real beginning is with the act of seeing; it is looking, and not a sensation of light.” Accordingly,

“if one is reading a book, if one is hunting, if one is watching in a dark place on a lonely night, if one is performing a chemical experiment, in each case, the noise has a very different psychical value; it is a different experience. In any case, what proceeds the ‘stimulus’ is a whole act, a sensori-motor coordination.”

Therefore, the experience is “the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives.” Situations include objects as well as relations, i.e. a complex that Dewey calls “environment.” As he puts it, “in actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; *an* object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an enviroing experienced world – a situation.” So, experience in the first place is “the manifestation of interactions of organism and environment;” interactions are necessary conditions for defining “the self” that is “a factor *within* experience and not something outside of it to which experiences are attached as the self’s private property.” Experience rests at the heart of how people think and imagine the world. However, not every interaction counts as experience. For example, when the child burns his finger in the flame, the burn is the result of

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6 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 331.

7 Dewey 1896, pp. 358–359.

8 Dewey 1896, p. 361.

9 Dewey 1934 / 1987, p. 50.

10 Dewey 1938 / 1986, p. 72 (italics in the original).

11 Dewey 1939–1941 / 1988, p. 16.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 17 (italics in the original).

the interaction of the organism (the child) with the environment; however, physical change (burn) becomes an experience only if movement is connected with pain as the result of this movement.

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Such an understanding of experience is the core of the educational model at Black Mountain College. The strategy of John Andrew Rice, the founder of the College, was to create an environment that allows students (organisms in Dewey's terminology) to interact with their teachers, who traditionally lived on campus and shared many extracurricular activities with students, with guests of the College, including John Dewey, with various materials they used in their art classes, i.e. with the environment in narrow and broader senses. All interactions imaginable were aimed at enriching their experiences. Rice, inspired by Dewey's pragmatist ideas that got his attention in the 1930s and drawing on his own experience, both as a student and as a teacher, developed a model of education that he tried to apply at Black Mountain College. Disappointed in traditional methods of academic research that seemed to him too distant from life, Rice was looking for the educational model that would put students in the very midst of life:

“Research is the report of what one has found out rather than of what one knows. The area of exploration is outside oneself, and, if not already dead, must be deadened; for, just as the herbalist cannot recognize a living specimen but must have it first pressed and dried, so the psychologist, who might, of all the scientists, report what he knows inside himself, prepares his specimen by expressing life. I knew, at the end of my stay in England, that, whatever I should do, I could not spend my life apart from life.”

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His assumption was that the acquisition of new knowledge and enrichment of experience were outcomes of students' continuous interaction with the permanently changing educational environment. In Black Mountain College this environment was loosely structured, multifocal, and in an on-going process of transfiguration and transformation. During the time of Dewey's close involvement with the college, there were only two compulsory courses in the curriculum and a number of electives; one course taught by Rice was on Plato, and Albers taught a drawing class. The choice of optional courses varied from economics and mathematics to literature and music, and advisors, assigned to each student, provided guidance. Of greatest importance was to develop in students the ability and the habit of independent reasoning: “The aim of the college in the academic area is to give students a sound introduction to major subjects that lie in the four areas of the curriculum and to develop sufficient grasp of a special

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13 Dewey 1916 / 1980, p. 146.

14 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 296.

15 field so that a student may be able to form independent judgments within it.” Almost all classes took place in informal settings, even theoretical ones, e.g. Rice’s course on Plato; and art classes entailed a lot of creativity from students and teachers. Besides, students were not given grades during the period of study, although they had very serious graduating examinations conducted by external experts that were specially invited for the finals. Groups were small (from four or five to twelve students) and schedules were individually customized as each student had his or her own work plan developed by the student with a help of the advisor. Rice believed it was the way to educate “a whole man:”

16 “In other places education was part of the day and part of the man; in Black Mountain it was round the clock and all of a man. There was no escape. Three meals together, passing in the hall, meeting in classes, meeting everywhere, a man taught by the way he walked, by the sound of his voice, by every movement. That was what it was intended to be, the fulfillment of an old idea, the education of the whole man: by a whole man.”

17 The process of study at Black Mountain College could be interpreted, using Dewey’s language, as “a continuously ordered sequence of acts, all adapted in themselves and in the order of their sequence, to reach a certain objective end.” Reaching an objective end presupposes inquiry, since the self in the process of interacting with the environment, can encounter unfamiliar situations, which Dewey calls problematic, that require non-conventional responses. The subject of the situation is not a passive spectator but an active participant looking for solutions of problems. The result of his or her inquiry is the “*transformation of an indeterminate situation*” into “*a unified whole*,” i.e. making sense of the contextual relations that shape the situation.

18 One of the examples of inciting in students the appetite for problem solving can be found in Anni Albers’s description of her teaching method. The artist put students into a hypothetical problematic situation and encouraged them to find the way out:

“I tried to put my students at the point of zero. I tried to have them imagine, let’s say, that they are in a desert in Peru, no clothing, no nothing, no pottery even at that time, and to imagine themselves at the beach with nothing... And it’s hot and windy. So what do you do? You wear the skin of some kind of animal maybe to protect yourself from too much sun or maybe the wind occasionally. And you

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15 Kurtz 1944, p. 5.

16 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 322.

17 Dewey 1896, p. 366.

18 Dewey 1938 / 1986, p. 108 (italics in the original).

want a roof over something and so on. And how do you gradually come to realize what a textile can be? And we start at that point.”

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Albers emphasizes the acquisition of experience rather than any definite outcomes of a problem-solving process. She sees her task in stimulating students' imagination that would help them to solve problems. This coincides with Dewey's view of the educational process as making the subject matter of a particular class a part of student's experience. Dewey understood teachers' guidance in the classroom not as “external imposition” but as “*freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfillment.*”

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### Art as education

In Dewey's natural metaphysics of experience art occupies a special role. Comparing art and nature, Dewey defines art as “a natural event in which nature otherwise partial and incomplete comes fully to itself.” Every experience, including an aesthetic one, is a result of “vital interaction of a live creature with the environment in which he exists.” Art is born out of interaction of the organism (the artist) with the environment and is a part of the environment with which the organism interacts. For Dewey art is a kind of practice similar to inquiry and is different not from a theory but from practice, which is not based on experience. The main trait of art is reliance on experience, which is an integral part of various live activities in which “the whole creature is alive.” Dewey sees experience as a response “to imbalance and dissonance in our environment;” for him “the creation of harmony and unity is an inherent feature of experience and the root of the aesthetic.” Thus, the “generation through active manipulation of the environment of unity and harmony produces order and form,” which are “a function of what is in the actual scene in its interaction with what the beholder brings with him.”

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Black Mountain College never aspired to be an art school; from the very start it was accredited and operated as a liberal arts college. At this period in US education, the creative arts were taught in specialized art academies and not in liberal arts colleges. Black Mountain College was the first college that placed creative arts on a par with liberal arts. Arts and crafts were seen as a way to provide the wholeness of experience and give it an aesthetic dimension. The main advantage of putting the arts

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19 Cited in Smith / South 2014, p. 30.

20 Dewey 1902–1903 / 1976, p. 281 (italics in the original).

21 Dewey 1925 / 1981, p. 269.

22 Dewey 1934 / 1987, p. 138.

23 Ibid., p. 33.

24 Ryder 2020, p. 119.

25 Ibid.

26 Dewey 1934 / 1987, p. 93.

on a par with the sciences, languages and literatures was “that the arts, like literature, social studies, or the sciences when widely conceived, are treated as a focus for many aspects of life;” therefore the goal of including creative arts into the liberal arts college’s curriculum was “not so much to produce artists as to develop an understanding of the worlds and the languages with which the various arts have to do.”

Black Mountain College in its not very long history experienced several different approaches to experimentation that were introduced by the German artist Josef Albers, the American composer John Cage, the American architect, designer and inventor Richard Buckminster Fuller, and the American poet Charles Olson. Each of the approaches put creative arts or poetry in the center of the educational model.

In his essay titled “*Art as Experience*” (1935), which draws heavily on Dewey’s aesthetic theory and the notion of experience, Josef Albers explains the rationale for including the creative arts in the curriculum:

“I believe it is now time to make a similar change of method in our art teaching: that we move from looking at art as a part of historical science to an understanding of art as a part of life. Under the term “art” I include all fields of artistic purposes – the fine arts and applied arts, also music, dramatics, dancing, the theatre, photography, movies, literature and so on. [...] If art is an essential part of culture and life, then we must no longer educate our students either to be art historians or to be imitators of antiquities, but for artistic seeing, artistic working, and more, for artistic living. Since artistic seeing and artistic living are a deeper seeing and living – and school has to be life – since we know that culture is more than knowledge, we in the school have the duty to remove all the fields of art from their decorative side-place into the center of education – as we are trying to do at Black Mountain College.”

Albers describes an ideal student as one “who sees art as neither a beauty shop nor imitation of nature, [...] but as a spiritual documentation of life; one who sees that real art is essential life and essential life is art.” Albers’ famous motto, “I want to open eyes,” fosters an educational model that favors creativity and encourages experimentation, since it is “only through experimenting with the elements in various distinct branches of art that students first recognized their real abilities.” The virtue of experiment is that it “leads us to the most decisive factor in education – experience.” It is

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27 Kurtz 1944, p. 1.

28 On experiments in art at Black Mountain College see: Díaz 2014.

29 J. Albers 2014, p. 231.

30 J. Albers 2014, p. 232.

31 Albers spoke this phrase at the first general meeting of Black Mountain College at the beginning of the new college year on the 22nd of September 1941.

32 J. Albers 1934, p. 3.

33 J. Albers 2014, p. 264.

clear that Albers here means experience in Dewey's sense, i.e. based on interaction with the environment and on inquiry that in Dewey's sense presupposes the activity of an artist, who expands his experience in the process of creating a work of art, as well as the activity of a recipient of this work of art (a spectator). There are two inquiries and two inquirers, one is the artist, and another is the spectator. Black Mountain College was creating opportunities for students to try on both roles, each one being inquiry.

In his art classes Josef Albers endorsed "manual work," advocating experimentation and "learning by doing." Anni Albers also linked manual work with liberating students' imagination:

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"Material, that is to say unformed or unshaped matter, is the field where authority blocks independent experimentation less than in many other fields, and for this reason it seems well fitted to become the training ground for invention and free speculation. It is here that even the shyest beginner can catch a glimpse of exhilaration of creating, by being a creator while at the same time he is checked by irrevocable laws set by nature of the material, not by man."

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"Learning by doing", whose advocates in the College were the Alberses, is the concept that Dewey proposed in "*Democracy and Education*", stating that:

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"When education, under the influence of a scholastic conception of knowledge which ignores everything but scientifically formulated facts and truths, fails to recognize that primary or initial subject matter always exists as matter of active doing, involving the use of the body and the handling of material, the subject matter of instruction is isolated from the needs and purposes of the learner, and so becomes just a something to be memorized and reproduced upon demand. Recognition of the natural course of development, on the contrary, always sets out with situations which involve learning by doing. Arts and occupations form the initial stage of the curriculum, corresponding as they do to knowing how to go about the accomplishment of ends."

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"Learning by doing" creates experiences and so is called 'an experience', which is marked by the presence of "aesthetic quality." Dewey's well-known definition of 'an experience' underlines its completeness: "we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment [...] a problem receives its solution;

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34 Cf. J. Albers 1944.

35 A. Albers 1938, p. 3.

36 The German translation of *Democracy and Education* (*Demokratie und Erziehung. Eine Einleitung in die philosophische Pädagogik*) was published in 1930; Albers supposedly read the book in German.

37 Dewey 1916 / 1980, p. 192.



38 a game is played through.” When experience reaches such consummation, it is “a  
 39 whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an*  
 experience.”

An experience happens in a problematic situation, the subject of which is not  
 a passive spectator but an active participant. An experience is qualitatively unique  
 experience. It includes an emotional component and means intensive living of one’s  
 life. What is of importance for understanding the flexible structure of the educational  
 model at Black Mountain College is Dewey’s conviction that *an* experience is impos-  
 40 sible in “a world of mere flux,” and that “a world that is finished, ended, would have  
 no traits of suspense and crisis, and would offer no opportunity for resolution.” The  
 world that makes an experience possible is “the actual world”, which is “a combina-  
 41 tion of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions.” Black Mountain College  
 was designed as a world facilitating activities that lead to *an* experience; it was struc-  
 tured accordingly. It was an institution where the student found himself in problemat-  
 ic situations and had to reestablish “equilibrium with his surroundings”, experiencing  
 42 “intensest life” in “the moment of passage from disturbance into harmony.” Including  
 the creative arts in the curriculum was the way to develop students’ independent  
 thinking and enriching their experiences:

“Black Mountain, we said, would be a means; the end was the individual. That  
 sounded well, but I was not satisfied. I knew that the life span of an idea in a  
 college was at most ten years; that at the end of that time, or earlier, the insti-  
 tution sank back into mere existence. I asked John Dewey about that. He re-  
 assured me; said, “As long as you keep your eye on the individual, that won’t  
 43 happen”.”

### Democracy as a ~~Form of Life~~

The aspiration of the Black Mountain College teaching community was “to educate a  
 44 student as a person and as a citizen.” Life was considered to be “more important than  
 school”, and the student and the learning to be “more important than the teacher and  
 45 the teaching.” Orientation towards educating students to be responsible citizens was  
 proclaimed as one of the College’s primary tasks: “If we accept education as life and

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38 Dewey 1934 / 1987, p. 42 (italics in the original).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p. 22.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., p. 22.

43 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 324.

44 Kurtz 1944, p. 3.

45 J. Albers 1934, p. 8.

as preparation for life, we must relate all school work, including work in art, as closely as possible to modern problems.”

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Dewey identifies democratic society as “an inclusive and permeating community of action and thought.” He understands democracy as openness for various relationships contributing to enrichment of the experience of society’s members. Therefore, democracy is not an ideal state but a process and an action. In democratic society “interests are mutually interpenetrating” and social groups in the process of free interaction undergo “continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.” Thus, Dewey’s definition of democracy

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“rests on two observations: that all communities require some interests held in common by their members, and that healthy communities are characterized by their members’ pursuit of communication and further interests held in common with those beyond the borders of their own communities.”

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Black Mountain College, on one hand, attempted to educate students for democratic society as described by Dewey, and on the other, aspired to be such a kind of society itself.

Democracy was believed to be at the very core of the university structure. The founders hoped to eliminate separations between students and faculty, as well as faculty and administration, i.e. to create a self-governed institution without hierarchical distinctions. It never had a board of directors; governing was executed by a Board of Fellows, which included faculty members and one student, and was headed by the elected rector. No important decision affecting the students was made without students’ approval. Education at Black Mountain College was supposed to raise a generation that would be able to build a democratic society and to live in it: “We need citizens who have toughness of mind, a capacity for meeting the unexpected with clear eye, and a steadiness of purpose that is based on the sure knowledge derived from experience, understanding, and practical competence.” Rice called Black Mountain College “a pure democracy” and associated the community that it formed with *communitas*, i.e. a group of equal members sharing a common experience in a kind of rite of passage. As he said, “We were, without intending to become or calling ourselves, a big family; or, if you choose, a tribe.” Dewey does not bring *communitas* into his discussion of democracy; however, there is some resemblance between Rice’s interpretation of the College as *communitas* and Dewey’s view on democratic

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46 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

47 Dewey 1916 / 1980, p. 88.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

49 Ryder 2020, p. 174–175.

50 Kurtz 1944, p. 4.

51 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 324.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 334.

society. The similarity is in the open character of Black Mountain College community and its ability to change “through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse.”

Albers underscored “openness” as one of the desirable features of a student educated for democracy:

“Our aim is a general development of an open-eyed and open-minded youth seeking out the growing spiritual problems of our days, not closed to his environment; and forward-looking, with the experience that interests and needs are changing; a youth with criticism enough to recognize that so-called “good old forms” sometimes can be over-used, that perhaps some great art important to our parents does not say anything to us; one who has reverence for earnest work and working, even though it seems at first new and strange to him, and is able to withhold judgment until clearer perception comes; who knows that one’s own experience and discovery and independent judgment are much more than repeated book knowledge.”

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Black Mountain College put an emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of experience, and the “openness” of eyes and minds that characterizes “a person and a citizen”, was seen as the main goal of education:

“Black Mountain College aims to educate persons as well as minds. Life in a community, with its attendant work and the social awareness and competences derived therefrom, and the development of esthetic sensibilities that enrich individual living, are regarded as parts of that education. Direct experience of the democratic processes and of some of the common tasks of the world, in a context of intensive liberal arts study, seem to the faculty of this college to provide one significant way to educate American citizens.”

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Art was in the center of the curriculum of the college because it was seen as the principle vehicle to “open eyes” and thus to reach the educational goal, “the democratic man.” The notions of democracy and art were tightly linked:

“The democratic man, we said, must be an artist. The integrity, we said, of the democratic man was the integrity of the artist, an integrity of relationship. The history of man had been the struggle between man and his environment, that is, the corporation of his fellows; sometimes one was winner, sometimes the other. When the individual won, he found himself the individualist, when the

corporation, a polyp. That was the struggle then on in Europe, now in the whole world.”

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Expectably, Rice does not see a place for competition in the democratic society. On the contrary, for him teaching the arts means teaching harmony, which excludes competition:

“The artist, we said, was not a competitor. He competed only with himself. His struggle was inside, not against his fellows, but against his own ignorance and clumsiness. The painting was his integrity, the score, the words of a play, and, at last, understanding, the will and the skill to do with his fellows, with the corporation, what he had done with paints and sounds: the integrity that was a relationship between himself and the corporation. But just as the painter must learn to paint, starting with ignorance and clumsiness, so this new artist, this creator of integrity between himself and his fellows, must know and know how, must have knowledge and skill. Also, just as the artist would not paint his picture with muddy colors, so this artist must see clear colors in humanity; and must himself be clear color, for he too was his fellow artist’s color, sound, form, the material of his art. But, different from pigment, bow, granite, not used up in the use; rather, made more of what he would be, a note within the symphony, the clearer for having been written; giving up, and asked to give up, nothing of himself. That was the integrity of the artist as artist. That should be the integrity of man as man.”

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Dewey thought that ultimately

“all education is experimental, whether we call it that or not. We simply can’t help that and we are experimenting with very precious and valuable material in the lives of these young people. [...] practically everything we do, every course we lay out, every class we meet, is in its effects an experiment for good or for bad.”

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However, Black Mountain College stands out from other attempts to include art in education and educate a student as a democratic citizen, e.g. Albert Barnes Foundation, where Dewey was a director and which was also opened for various innovations and experiments in teaching art.

To understand Black Mountain College, it is necessary to see it as a complex existing in a context (the environment). The College was shaped by a number of ideas,

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55 Rice 1942 / 2014, p. 328.

56 Ibid., p. 329.

57 Dewey 1931 – 1932 / 1985, p. 423.

not just a single one, including Dewey's ideas of the organism-environment interaction, inquiry, art as education, and art as experience. It was a complex phenomenon, a multi-universe, based on its own rules. Of the more than 1,000 students that attended the College, only around 60 graduated. However, Black Mountain College can be named one of the most successful experiments in education. There are several facts that speak for this evaluation and graduation numbers are not among them. The College existed for 24 years. It survived the departure of its founder Rice without changing its principal nature. It produced many serious artists, despite the fact that such results were never seen as its goal. It never became single-personality centered; the general idea of experimental and practice-based education was greater than personal ambitions. It turned out to be more successful in generating a creative atmosphere than many specialized art schools, and became an attraction for artists. Art, especially innovative experimental art, needs co-thinkers and an audience, and the College provided both. Black Mountain College was an example of progressive education but it was also more than that. It was a form of life.

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