
Pragmatism in Education

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Abstract

When applied to problems in teaching philosophy, pragmatism improves philosophical teaching. It does so by deflating and clarifying the meaning of its problems and providing ways to understand and evaluate their effects on students and teachers. Pragmatism as a philosophy of education has only come into its own in the very late nineteenth and the twentieth century's. This is largely due to the work of a number of educational philosophies such as William Heard Kilpatrick, Boyd Bode, and George Counts. These men built an education structure on a philosophical foundation wrought by such philosophers as Chauncey Wright, William James, Charles S. Peirce, and the man who best combined the roles of educator and philosopher, John Dewey.

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Introduction

The root of the word pragmatism is a Greek word meaning work. According to pragmatism, the truth or meaning of an idea or a proposition lies in its observable practical consequences rather than anything metaphysical. It can be summarized by the phrase whatever works, is likely true. Because reality changes, whatever works will also change - thus, truth must also be changeable and no one can claim to possess any final or ultimate truth. In other word, pragmatism is the philosophy that encourages us to seek out the processes and do things that work best to help us achieve desirable ends (Ozmon and Craver, 2008). Pragmatism is also a practical, matter-of-fact way of approaching or assessing situations or of solving problems. However, we might wonder why people insist on doing things and using processes that do not work. Several true reasons for this to happened is because the weight of the customs and tradition, fear and apathy, and the fact that habitual ways of thinking and doing seem to work even though they have lost use in today's world. Although pragmatism as a philosophical movement began in the United States of America in the late 1800s, but its roots can be traced back to British, European, and the ancient Greek philosophical traditions. One important element of this tradition is the development of world-view with regards to scientific revolution. The questioning attitudes cultivated by the Enlightenment and the development of a more naturalistic humanism also have outgrows this movement. The background of pragmatism can be found in the works of such people like Francis Bacon and John Locke.

For Dewey, a democratic society must be mobile and dynamic; it is a society in which teachers know that what works for one student might not work for another. He believed that experience is not a mental state that is within us; instead, we are within experience. For Dewey, a democratic society is not one that makes provisions for equal participation in its good for all its members. This kind of society involves flexible readjustments of its institutions through interactions among the different forms of life (Boisvert, 1988; Campbell, 1995; Gouinlock, 1972; Sleeper, 1987; Welchman, 1995).

According to pragmatism the theory and practice of education is based on two main principles, viz:

- (i) Education should have a social function, and
- (ii) Education should provide real-life experience to the child.

FORMS OF PRAGMATISM

1. HUMANISTIC PRAGMATISM-

This type of pragmatism is particularly found in social sciences. According to it the satisfaction of human nature is the criterion of utility. In philosophy, in religion and even in science man is the aim of all thinking and everything else is a means to achieve human satisfaction.

2. EXPERIMENTAL PRAGMATISM-

Modern science is based upon experimental method. The fact that can be ascertained by experiment is true. No truth is final, truth is known only to the extent it is useful in practice. The pragmatists use this criterion of truth in every field of life. The human problems can be solved only through experiment.

3. NOMINALISTIC PRAGMATISM-

When we make any experiment we attend to the result. Our aim is examination of the material. Some hypothesis about the results invariably precedes every experiment. According to nominalistic pragmatism, the results of an experiment are always particular and concrete, never general and abstract.

4. BIOLOGICAL PRAGMATISM-

Experimentalism of John Dewey is based upon this biological pragmatism according to which the ultimate aim of all knowledge is harmony of the man with the environment. Education develops social skill which facilitates one's life. The school is a miniature society which prepares the child for future life.

PRINCIPLES OF PRAGMATISM

1. PLURALISM-

Philosophically, the pragmatists are pluralists. According to them there are as many words as human beings. The ultimate reality is not one but many. Everyone searches truth and aim of life according to his experiences.

2. EMPHASIS ON CHANGE-

The pragmatists emphasize change. The world is a process, a constant flux. Truth is always in the making. The world is ever progressing and evolving.

3. UTILITARIANISM-

Pragmatists are utility is the test of all truth and reality. A useful principle is true. Utility means fulfillment of human purposes.

4. CHANGING AIM AND VALUES-

The aim and values of life change in different times and climes. The old aims and values, therefore, cannot be accepted as they are. Human life and the world is a laboratory in which the aims and values are developed.

5. INDIVIDUALISM-

Pragmatists are individualists. They put maximum premium upon freedom in human life. Liberty goes with equality and fraternity. Everyone should adjust to his environment.

6. EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL ASPECTS-

Since man is a social animal therefore, he develops in social circumstances. His success is success in society. The aim of education is to make him successful by developing his social personality.

7. EXPERIMENTALISM-

Pragmatists are experimentalists. They give more importance to action than ideas. Activity is the means to attain the end of knowledge.

PRAGMATISM AND EDUCATIVE PROCESS

Activity lies at the centre of all educative process. The basis of all teaching is the activity of the child, says Foster. Every continuous- experience or activity is educative and all education, in fact, resides in having such

experience. But continuous growth in experience is not the whole education. Education is something more. It is a constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience. Pragmatism approaches the problems of education from the 'progressivists' view point "progress implies change. Change further implies novelty", so education cannot be conceived of as acquired once for all. Problem solving is at the core of all education. The educative process thus becomes empirical, experimental, and piecemeal: in a word pragmatic.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

1. EDUCATION AS LIFE-

Pragmatists firmly believe that old and traditional education is dead and lifeless. Education is a continuous reorganizing, reconstructing and integrating the experience and activities of race. They want to conserve the worthwhile culture of the past, think out the solutions to meet the new situations and then integrate the two. Real knowledge can be gained only by activity, experiments and real life experiences.

2. EDUCATION AS GROWTH-

Thus education will be useful if it brings about the growth and development of the individual as well as the society in which he lives. Education is meant for the child and child is not meant for education and child is not empty bottle to be filled up by outside knowledge. Each child is born with inherent capacities, tendencies and aptitudes which are drawn out and developed by education. One of the aims of education is to develop all the inherent capacities of the child to the fullest extent.

3. EDUCATION AS A SOCIAL PROCESS-

To pragmatism, man is a social being. He gains more and more knowledge through personal experiences than he gets from books. According to pragmatism, the education of the child should be through the medium of society so that develops in him socially desirable qualities which promote his welfare and happiness. John Dewey rightly speaks out – Education is the social continuity of life.

4. EDUCATION A CONTINUOUS RESTRUCTURING OF EXPERIENCE-

Education is a process of development. Knowledge is gained by experiences and experiments, conducted by the learner himself. One exercise leads to another and so on and the area of knowledge is widened by the child. The process of reconstruction of experience goes on and leads to adjustment and development of personality. For pragmatists educational process has no end beyond itself. In addition to the individual it is continuous reorganizing restructuring and integrating the experience and activities of the race.

5. EDUCATION THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STATE

Education is the birth right of each individual and may not be within the right of the individual, so the state should shoulder the responsibility. The refusal of the state to do so may not lead the nation to suffering. It is for the state to make the child capable and confident to meet the problems and challenges of life successfully.

Pragmatism and Aims of Education:

Pragmatism does not lay down any aims of education in advance. It believes that there can be no fixed aims of education. Life is dynamic and subject to constant change, and hence the aims of education are bound to be dynamic. Education deals with human life. It must help the children to fulfill their biological and social needs.

The pragmatist educator aims at the harmonious development of the educand — physical, intellectual, social and aesthetic. The aim of education, therefore, is to direct "the impulses, interests, desires and abilities towards 'the satisfaction of the felt wants of the child in his environment.'"

The children should be so trained that they may be able to solve their present-day problems efficiently and to adjust themselves to their social environment. They should be creative and effective members of the society. Their outlook should be so dynamic that they can change with the changing situations.

PRAGMATISM AND CURRICULUM

In the field of curriculum development, the following principles have been prescribed by pragmatists.

1. PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

According to this principle, only those subjects, activities and experiences should be included in the curriculum which are useful to the present needs of the child and also meet the future expectations of adult life as well. As such Language, physical well-being, physical training, Geography, History, Science, Agriculture and Home science for girls should be included in the curriculum.

2. PRINCIPLE OF INTEREST

According to this principle, only those activities and experiences where in the child takes interest should be included in the curriculum. According to John Dewey these interests are of four varieties namely- (1) interest in conversation, (2) interest in investigation, (3) interest in construction and (4) interest in creative expression. Keeping these varieties of interests in view, at the primary stage, the curriculum should include Reading, Writing, Counting, Art, Craft-work, Natural science and other practical work of simple nature.

3. PRINCIPLE OF EXPERIENCE

The third principle of pragmatic curriculum is the child's activity, vocation and experience. All these three should be closely integrated. The curriculum should consist of such varieties of learning experiences which promote original thinking and freedom to develop social and purposeful attitudes.

4. PRINCIPLE OF INTEGRATION

Pragmatic curriculum deals with the integration of subjects and activities. According to pragmatism knowledge is one unit. Pragmatists want to construct flexible, dynamic and integrated curriculum which aids the developing child and the changing society more and more as the needs, demands and situation require.

Pragmatism and Methods of Teaching:

The principle of philosophy of pragmatic method of teaching is practical utility. The child is the central figure in this method. Pragmatic method is an activity-based method. The essence of pragmatic method is learning through personal experience of the child. To a pragmatist education means preparation for practical life.

To the pragmatist — “education is not so much teaching the child things he ought to know, as encouraging him to learn for himself through experimental and creative activity”. Learning by doing makes a person creative, confident and cooperative. The pragmatic method is socialistic in nature. His learning should be thoroughly purposive. He should learn to fulfill the purpose of his life.

The method employed by the pragmatist teacher is experimental. The pupil is required to discover the truth for himself. To facilitate this discovery the application of the inductive and heuristic methods of teaching is necessary. Experiences should, therefore, be planned to arouse the curiosity of children to acquire knowledge.

Textbooks and teachers are not so much important in pragmatic education. Their position is secondary in the teaching- learning process. They are required to suggest and prompt only. The teacher suggests problems, indicates the lines of active solution and then leaves the students to experiment for themselves. The child learns for himself. Pragmatic education is thus auto-education or self-education.

Pragmatic method is a Project Method which is of American origin. “A project is a whole-hearted purposeful activity, proceeding in a social environment.” This definition is given by Kilpatrick, a follower of Dewey. A project has also been defined in other ways.

TEACHER

Pragmatism regards teacher as a helper, guide and philosopher. The chief function of pragmatic teacher is to suggest problems to his pupils and to stimulate them to find by themselves, the solutions, which will work. The teacher must provide opportunities for the natural development of innate qualities of children. His main task is to suggest problems to his pupils and to guide them to find out solutions.

DISCIPLINE

To utilize the interest of the pupil is the basis of discipline here. The teacher and pupils attack a problem jointly. Teacher's role is that of a guide and a director; it is the pupil who acts, learning this becomes a

cooperative venture- a joint enterprise. Pursuit of common purposes enforces its own order. Education becomes a social process of sharing between the members of the various groups and all are equal partners in the process. That is no rewards also there are no placing for the martinet so any punishments. The discipline proceeds from the life of the school as a whole.

DEMERITS OF PRAGMATISM

1. OPPOSITION TO ETERNAL TRUTHS

Pragmatism is opposed to pre-determined truth. According to it, truth changes according to a change in circumstances, times and places and is created by the consequences of our actions and experiences. Pragmatists hold that if the results of an activity are satisfying, then it is true otherwise not.

2. OPPOSITION OF PRE-DETERMINED IDEAS AND VALUES-

This emphasizes that ideals and values are man-made and change according to changes in circumstances, times and places. But all noble things have entered into this human world by the efforts of those great persons who were inspired by the great ideals namely- truth, beauty and goodness.

3. NO PRE-DETERMINED AIMS OF EDUCATION

There are no set and pre determined aims of education as well. In the absence of definite aims of education, all educational plans and efforts may go astray and achieve nothing.

4. NEGATIONS OF SPIRITUAL VALUES-

Pragmatists deny the existence of spiritual values. Negligence of spiritual value is a great blunder. Without developing spiritual values achieving human welfare, peace and satisfaction is simply to cry for the moon.

5. OPPOSITION OF INTELLECTUALITY-

Pragmatists believe that a man's intelligence is subservient to his innate tendencies. This makes him only an animal.

6. NEGATION OF POST

Agmatists, emphasizing only the present and future, and neglects the past. Without the knowledge of past one cannot understand the present and without knowing the present thoroughly nothing can be predicted for the future.

MERITS OF PRAGMATISM

1. CONSTRUCTION OF PROJECT METHOD

In the field of methods of teaching, pragmatism has given birth to project method. This method, a child indulging in various creative activities, is able to solve many problems which cater to his natural progress and development.

2. IMPORTANCE OF CHILD-

Opposing bookish knowledge and formal education, pragmatism lays great stress upon the development of child's individuality by his own efforts.

3. EMPHASIS ON ACTIVITY

Pragmatism emphasizes upon activity. The principle of learning by doing is the main contribution of pragmatism

4. FAITH IN APPLIED LIFE-

Pragmatism emphasizes the practical life of child. Pragmatic education prepares the child for future life in a very effective manner.

5. SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION-

Pragmatism develops in the child love for democratic values and social efficiency which bring harmonious adjustment and development of personality.

6. INFUSION OF NEW LIFE IN EDUCATION-

Pragmatism has revolutionized the process of education to a very great extent. This has infused a new life and zest in education.

CONCLUSION

The student-centered curriculum calls for team teaching and courses offered by different departments. Projects and hands-on experiences have definite advantages over lectures. According to pragmatists, this methodology focuses on giving students a great deal of autonomy as well as alternatives to their current learning circumstances. The learning environment turns into a methodical laboratory in which thoughts are experienced to determine whether they can be authenticated.

Pragmatic philosophy is a practical philosophy, having no fixed or absolute standards. Man always creates new values and education should help him in doing so. Being practical and utilitarian school of philosophy, pragmatism has influenced education to the maximum extent. It has tried overcoming the limitations of other schools like idealism and naturalism and has influenced world in a great deal.

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