Dissertation Title: John Dewey on the Aim of Education: A Critical Analysis
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Academic Year: 2005

ABSTRACT

The philosophy of education is the application of philosophical supposition to educational problems. As the practice of education leads us to philosophical ideas or to the foundation of philosophy of education, there are two opposing approaches to the practice of education in modern times. They disagree on what children should learn, whether in relation to virtue or to what is best for life. Besides, there are questions in regards to whether education ought to be directed toward children’s intellect than children’s growth. It is true to say that good educational aims can lead to good educational practices, and good educational practices can also lead to good educational aims, nevertheless, the aim of the philosophy of education as the means to guide children or learners to find appropriate instruments will help them reach the final goals of life to live effectively and harmoniously.

This dissertation deals with the two opposing approaches in the philosophy of education, namely progressivism and traditionalism or non-progressivism. The renowned educator, John Dewey, claims that pragmatic philosophy, which is based upon the Darwinian theory of natural selection, can lead to a good educational aim. Dewey’s attack on traditionalism’s dualistic conception is one of the central themes of his philosophy. If Darwin’s theory is the one important factor of Dewey’s thought that gives
light to scientific explanation, then traditionalism's dualistic conception could no longer hold. The idea of evolution affected not only the conception of nature, but also theories of knowledge and of value, and eventually, education.

According to Dewey's progressivism, Darwin's idea of evolution and the changes in natural species implies changes in knowledge. For Dewey, knowledge means knowing or doing. It is dynamic and subjects to continuous change, as it derives from experience. For traditionalists, Plato and his followers, knowledge is permanent and unchanging because the objects upon which knowledge is built are permanent and unchanging. For Plato, knowledge is "what is"; it is more than doing which focuses on basic education, and can be attained from recollecting, reading, writing, and so on. Besides, knowledge can be attained through reason.

Dewey claims that the notion and the concept of child-centrist or progressive education emphasizes the individual child's needs and interests through experimental method in the framework of "learning by doing", and can enable and develop the child's whole life. Dewey's child-centrist approach is opposed to traditionalism's teacher-centrist approach, which focuses on intellectual discipline through subject matter. Dewey uses the concept of growth to represent his progressivism in education. Dewey believes that education is life; traditionalism asserts that education is preparation for life.

The researcher discovers that both Dewey's child-centrist and traditionalism's teacher-centrist educations are vital for today's education, nevertheless they are not sufficient for the development of a child's whole life. Dewey's child-centrist education is necessary and sufficient for the development of children's skills and practical activities but is not sufficient for the children's whole life as it lacks a knowledge base, which is
attained from intellectual subject discipline or textbooks. For the traditional approach, teacher-centrist education is necessary and sufficient for the development of the intellectual subject discipline as the foundation of the child’s life but not sufficient for enabling and developing the child’s experiences or practical activities in daily life. Therefore, to have a good educational aim and good educational practice in order to develop the child’s whole life, a reconciliation of the two approaches is definitely necessary. It is upon such an assertion that this research is dedicated.