

Philosophy of Education

Anthony Porporino

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University

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Jay Lister

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On Education

Purpose of Education

All discussions about matters of education must begin with its purpose (Barrow & Woods, 2006, pp. 10-11). What it means to *be educated* should be considered before other matters like: the role of the teacher, curriculum, pedagogy as well as comparing different educational systems (Barrow & Woods, 2006, p. 10). When defined, this purpose will act as a guide to answering questions on these topics. Barrow and Woods attempt to answer this question by analyzing the essential qualities of educated people. They claim being educated is not simply being knowledgeable or skilled, but rather is a transformation in their ability, behaviour, and understanding and view of the world (2006, pp. 30-34). While this is reasonable and does lead to further exploration, others such as Standish (2003) argue “The preoccupation with aims may stand in the way of the more patient characterization of good educational practice that is of real benefit [...] And it can deflect attention from the diversity of education, from the fact that it is not just one thing” (p. 223). From this perspective, a universal definition and complete understanding of what constitutes education is impossible to construct due to the complexity and diversity of human cultures and society. However, this does not mean that it is pointless to discuss and that universal characteristics of what constitutes a good education cannot be found.

A very broad but excellent first axiom of what constitutes education comes from Peters (1966, as cited in Barrow & Woods, 2006, p. 26) which states “It would be a logical contradiction to say that a man had been educated but that he had in no way changed for the better.” Education should at the very least be synonymous with personal betterment. This is in

line with the first obligation of a teacher in the Quebec Education Act which says “A teacher shall contribute to the intellectual and overall personal development of each student entrusted to his care” (CQLR, c. I-13.3, s. 22(1), 1997). After being educated, people should be autonomous and able to follow an internal sense of how to pursue a good life for the betterment of themselves and others. While this in no way describes all that education does or should do, it is the core idea of the purpose of education.

Theories of Education

The structure of our high schools, curriculum, schedules and lack of choices is in line with the philosophical theory of education known as essentialism. An essentialist theory of education argues that “schools should provide all students with the knowledge they need to function in a democratic society. Failure to transmit these necessary skills and subjects puts civilization in peril” (Bagley, as cited in Ornstein & Levine, 2008, p. 181). While this view of education is a reasonable effort to achieve the goal of equipping students with knowledge they need to survive in the world, it fails to provide them with perhaps the most important skill—an intrinsic desire, excitement and motivation to create, serve and accomplish in this world—. In some cases, the methods used to achieve this goal may even contradict with the main goal of education, personal betterment.

Essentialist theory of education is one of many teacher centred philosophy’s which is in contrast to student centred philosophy’s, one of which is known as progressivism. Ornstein and Levine (2008) describe progressivism as against the passive memorization of facts, and isolating schools from society but instead believes “(1) the child should be free to develop naturally; (2) interest, motivated by direct experience, is the best stimulus for learning [...]” (p. 188).

Progressivism is best summarized by the idea that learning should be in the hands of students and that having control over what they learn gives them a great advantage.

Both essentialism and progressivism hold truths. Without a mastery of basic skills like reading, writing and arithmetic people will struggle to integrate themselves into society. There are also many grand ideas and historical facts that people should be aware of even if they would rather learn something else. However, indirectly teaching people that they do not have a choice in the things they must learn and do, through imposing a strict curriculum and class structure, ignores an important truth: freedom to explore, find one's own problems to solve and own meaning in the world is an essential part of being human and an essential part of our society.

Schools and teachers should strive to balance essentialism and progressivism in a way that takes the best from both. Progressivism correctly understood that learning is most useful and occurs most easily when someone has a strong intrinsic desire to learn. It should be added that they must also believe they can learn, employ successful learning habits and that desire to learn occurs when people find the content meaningful and relevant. Essentialism on the other hand states that certain skills and knowledge are necessary and should be taught to everybody.

Teaching Philosophy

Aligned with the fundamental goal of education being personal betterment, the professional responsibility to teach a curriculum, and the understanding that learning is in the hands of the students, the teacher should: (1) instil in students an intrinsic desire to learn through inspiration and development of students' pre-existing passions, (2) provide good encouragement and feedback to ensure students have self confidence and push themselves to their full potential, and (3) teach and explore the diverse ways learning occurs to help students understand how they learn best. The teacher can and should accomplish all this by first having strong relationships

with the students based upon genuine caring for them (Kottler et al., 2005 pp. 49-62) and then by designing the class to be a safe environment that acts like a small community where ideas are challenged and people are pushed to become better. Palmer (2017) says that “teaching is the intentional act of creating [...] conditions that can help students learn a great deal” (p. 6) and a classroom that emulates the real world in some sense but also protects its students promoting healthy and appropriate dialogue all the while encouraging growth is ideal. A teacher should not only allow but also encourage students to explore the problems that interest them and help them develop their ability to teach themselves.

Motivations

The core reason I wish to be a teacher is to mimic and in some ways become the people who have influenced and inspired me the most: my previous teachers. Teachers hold an extremely important role in our society and have the opportunity to make strong impacts on the lives of many people. I believe teaching is meaningful work that can lead to a fulfilling life dedicated to helping others and that I can do it well. Palmer (2017) said that “we teach who we are” (p. 2) and that “good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). I believe that my identity is what will make me a good teacher. I have been extremely fortunate to have been raised by a loving family, be supported by caring friends, and have been taught by amazing and inspiring teachers which has led to me having strong moral values and respect for all human life. It has made me open minded, understanding of others, patient and kind. I have also persevered through many hardships, worked hard to achieve many accomplishments such as my bachelors of software engineering and learned the value in hard work. I believe I would be an excellent role model for students and would benefit my society through my influence on them.

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