

PRAGMATISM IN MODERN
EDUCATIONAL THEORY

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PRAGMATISM IN MODERN
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

This is a study of pragmatism and its influence in modern educational theory.

Method of Collecting Data

The material has been collected through extensive reading and study of research data in the fields of modern philosophy and education.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the philosophy of pragmatism is responsible for the techniques in modern educational theory.

In the second chapter pragmatism is defined. Then a study is made of pragmatism in modern educational theory.

The third chapter is a digest of the contemporary criticisms of pragmatic philosophy. An attempt has been made to show some of the critical comment modern scientists have made on pragmatism.

The second chapter with its explanation of pragmatism and its effects in modern educational theory serves as a

foundation for the conclusions and recommendations in
Chapter IV.

CHAPTER II

PRAGMATISM DEFINED: A STUDY OF PRAGMATISM IN MODERN EDUCATIONAL THEORY

Pragmatism Defined

The history of the term "pragmatism" is given by Professor William James: "The term is derived from the same Greek word meaning action, from which our words 'practice' and 'practical' come."¹ According to James, pragmatism was first introduced into philosophy by Charles Peirce, in an article "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," published in the Popular Science Monthly, January, 1878.² Peirce, after pointing out that our beliefs are really rules for action, said that to develop a thought's meaning, we need only to determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve -- what sensations we

¹William James, Pragmatism, a New Name for Old Ways of Thinking, p. 46.

²Ibid.

are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. This is Peirce's principle of pragmatism.³

James Bisset Pratt, in What Is Pragmatism? said that William James saw the weakness in Peirce's formulation of pragmatism and laid the foundation of his own pragmatism in inclusive terms. In his famous California address August 26, 1898, which we might almost call the birthday of pragmatism, James said that he should prefer to express Peirce's principle by saying that the effective meaning of any philosophic proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience, whether active or passive; the point lying rather in the fact that the experience must be particular than in the fact that it must be active. This interpretation of the term "practical" as meaning concrete and particular rather than as referring to action, James has consistently maintained every since. Pragmatism, according to James, is a temper of mind, an attitude; it is also a theory of the nature of ideas and truth; and finally, it is a theory about reality. It may be said that pragmatism offers us a theory of truth, and a theory of knowledge; and that it is trying to work out a theory of reality; and that it is also a general point of view or way of looking at things.

³Ibid., p. 47.

⁴James Bisset Pratt, What Is Pragmatism? pp. 9, 16, 19-20.

Pratt further maintains that pragmatism seeks and claims to be strenuous, militant, a plan of campaign rather than a celebration or an experience meeting. But it is in addition to this, a definite and technical doctrine or group of doctrines on certain fundamental philosophical questions. According to Pratt's philosophy the pragmatist may often succeed in solving our problems for us by simply demonstrating to us that they are no problems at all. Do not seek to solve a question, says pragmatism, until you know what you mean by it. Think so far as possible in concrete terms. Never let yourself be hoodwinked and brow-beaten by big words and verbal abstractions. Pratt states that pragmatism offers a practical and useful method for determining what philosophical questions are really worth discussing, and by application of this method we shall be enabled to eliminate a large body of worthless and abstract problems which are lumbering up our minds to no useful purpose. This method might be summed up in the rule never to discuss anything unless it has some genuine human interest, or unless it makes a real difference to someone.⁵

Theodore Flourney expresses in The Philosophy of William James the concept that pragmatism consists in the use of a very simple rule for clearing up philosophical ideas and facilitating the discussion of them, but a rule which,

⁵Ibid., pp. 6-7, 9, 38.

by implicating a theory as to the nature and role of our intelligence, is found to be eminently subversive of traditional conceptions. Thus in pragmatism are found, closely bound together, a method of research and a special doctrine concerning the human intellect. Thus pragmatism amounts simply to introducing into philosophy the scientific or experimental method which already prevails in other scientific fields, and which insists on the concrete verification of every theory.⁶ Flourney furthermore adds that pragmatism confines itself to clarifying and simplifying philosophic systems, by reducing them to their practical and concrete significance, but it does not decide between them, the final decision remaining a personal matter.⁷

According to Professor James' philosophy, pragmatism is a mediator and reconciler. She has in fact no prejudices whatever, no obstructive dogmas, no rigid canons of what shall count as proof. She will entertain any hypothesis; she will consider any evidence.⁸ James emphatically expresses, in his philosophy, the concept that pragmatism widens the field of search for God. Pragmatism is willing to count the humblest and most personal

⁶Theodore Flourney, The Philosophy of William James, pp. 44-46.

⁷Ibid., p. 50.

⁸James, op. cit., p. 79.

experiences. Her only test of probable truth is what works best in the way of leading us, what fits every part of life best and combines with collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted.⁹ Flourney in his Philosophy of William James, states that we do not live to think, as the intellectualists proclaim, but that we think in order to live. According to this manner of looking at things, the ideas of our intellect are no more than ingenious means of facing the exigencies in which we find ourselves and what we call their truth is neither more nor less than their efficacy. An idea is true or false as it leads or does not lead to the desired results.¹⁰

The word "pragmatism" spread, and at present it fairly spots the pages of philosophic journals. We find the "pragmatic movement" spoken of sometimes with respect, sometimes with contumely, seldom with clear understanding. It is evident that the term applies itself conveniently to a number of tendencies that hitherto have lacked a collective name and that it has "come to stay."¹¹ Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude; but it represents it, according to James, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable

⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰Flourney, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

¹¹James, op. cit., p. 47.

form than it has ever yet assumed. Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work. Meanwhile, the word pragmatism has come to be used in a still wider sense, as meaning also a certain theory of truth. The pragmatist clings to facts and concreteness, observes truth at its work in particular cases and generalizes. Pragmatism may be a happy harmonizer of empiricist ways of thinking with the more religious demands of human beings.¹²

James further adds that there is absolutely nothing new in the pragmatic method. Socrates was an adept at it, and Aristotle used it methodically. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume made contributions to truth by its means. But these forerunners of pragmatism used it in fragments; they were preludes only. Not until in our own time has it generalized itself, become conscious of a universal mission, pretended to a conquering destiny.¹³ Neither Locke nor Berkeley thought his truth out into perfect clearness, but they were the first to use the "pragmatic" method.¹⁴ Fournier said that we are, on the whole, a race of born pragmatists. We are anti-intellectualists by instinct. James himself remarked, on several occasions, that his conception of

¹²Ibid., pp. 51-53, 55, 68-69.

¹³Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁴William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 10.

things squared with liberty, exact science, democracy, and Protestantism. By putting the accent, he said, on concrete realities, particular things, the individual and precise consequences, pragmatism overturns the "throne of authority," so to speak, in the same sense as did the religious reformation. Nevertheless, he concluded, the Protestant countries have continued to exist, flourish, and develop, and it is fair to predict the same of this philosophic Protestantism, pragmatism.¹⁵

A Study of Pragmatism and Its Influence in Modern Educational Theory

Professor James never was in love with close-cropped symmetry or unity of the academic kind.¹⁶ As expressed by John Dewey, any theory of education which contemplates a more unified scheme of education than now exists is under the necessity of facing the question of the relation of man to nature.¹⁷ Pragmatism is democratic. Her manners are as various and flexible, her resources as rich and endless, and her conclusions as friendly as those of mother nature.¹⁸

John S. Brubacher in his Modern Philosophies of Education says that pragmatic philosophy seeks, not to eliminate

¹⁵Flourney, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁷John Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 324.

¹⁸James, Pragmatism, a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, p. 47.

preferences, but to make them explicit and to show to what consequences they lead in action. Philosophic thinking starts with something known or regarded as true, it is to be differentiated from the usual type of thinking which generally originates in doubt or perplexity as to what to do next. As a matter of fact, no learning or thinking, not even that arising out of problem situations, can start without some base. This is a cardinal point which those engaged in teaching should never overlook. Educational philosophy is not concerned with seeking out new facts. Rather it is content to get its facts from those who are especially fitted to provide them, the scientists. Thus it will go to biology, psychology, history, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, ethics, and others. While the philosophy of education is not equipped to add to these fields, yet it does secrete a kind of knowledge which grows out of attempting to integrate the varied and often contradictory data from these disciplines. In the course of this process the interaction of certain kinds of data tends to recur again, and again. When it does, the concepts so developed become strategic for use in later attempts at unity and consistency. Such are the concepts for academic freedom, respect for personality, self-realization, continuity, education as growth in a "precarious" universe. Only in this derived sense, then, does philosophy

develop and deal with a content of its own.¹⁹

Brubacher further adds that theory, however, is not impractical. It may be of the highest practical value because it enlarges the sphere of circumstances observed to influence conduct. Without philosophical theory, there is danger that educational practice will be no more firmly grounded than on empirical rule-of-thumb common sense or uncriticized tradition. One can hardly teach successfully, therefore, unless he studies the fundamental reason for things. But, again, educational philosophy has no monopoly on the practical uses of theory. The hypothetical stage in the scientific method is also theoretical. The difference between the two uses of theory lies, not in the degree of utility, but in the variety and extent of data for which a theory is formulated.²⁰

Sidney Hook writes that philosophy at its best is not a hand-maiden to politics and theology, nor an instrument of moral edification, but a critical activity which aims to clarify to ourselves what we know, what we live for and die for, what we do and what we say. It is critically relevant to the whole of life's activities and its exercise creates a value and adds a dimension to experience obtainable in no other way. It is through philosophical activity

¹⁹John S. Brubacher, Modern Philosophies of Education, pp. 3, 6-8.

²⁰Ibid., p. 9.

that mankind becomes conscious of itself -- of its possibilities and of its limitations.²¹

As expressed by Brubacher, education is one of the most commonplace activities to be found in society. When an international effort to teach is made, it is then that the inherent difficulties of education become apparent. The need is felt for making some systematic attack on the problems presented. The approach used here is that of "pragmatic philosophy." Probably a widespread approval would be given to a conception that philosophy directs attention to a certain totality of experiences. What the acts of teaching and learning require for fertilization is to be related to the total context of human endeavor. The classroom is always in danger of being walled in by the folkways of the community. They must be related to the past educational history and to what the sciences of education, such as psychology and sociology, know of the present. Their connections with religion and morals are equally important also. Their bearings must finally be gained in some measure from the speculative future. When one tries to order his teaching or learning in the light of its ultimate and most inclusive ramifications, an educational philosophy may be said to be emerging. The wholeness that educational philosophy seeks is more concerned with unity and

²¹H. M. Kallen and Sidney Hook, editors, American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow, p. 225.

consistency. It seeks a comprehensive viewpoint which will operate as a common denominator for the diversities of experiences. The manifold details with which it deals need not be reduced to a single principle of interpretation. All other philosophies which are neither monistic nor dualistic are included under pluralism. Such are philosophies like "pragmatism," which exalt the importance and uniqueness of individuality, the varieties of which are seemingly endless.²²

According to the philosophy of Robert Rusk, as expressed in The Philosophical Bases of Education, the modern pragmatists invert the Greek conclusions, and with as little hesitation as Aristotle contend that the true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good. The truth of a principle depends upon its effect on practice; the pragmatists thus subordinate speculative to practical activity. The pragmatic attitude is modern and typically English or Anglo-Saxon. The germ of the pragmatic spirit is to be traced to Bacon's introduction of the view that knowledge was to be sought for the Glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate; his aim was to establish a trustworthy system whereby nature might be interpreted and brought into the service of man. Locke in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding adopts what is practically the

²²Brubacher, op. cit., pp.1-3.

pragmatic standpoint; in Book I he affirms, "We shall not have much reason to complain of the narrowness of our minds, if we will but employ them about what may be of use to us," and in the Introduction, "Our business is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct."²³

Philosophy, instead of being the theory of education, is preferred as the study of the whole of reality.²⁴ Brubacher states that educational philosophy may be much concerned with the local and individual, and it is clear that it can be of great assistance to the art of education. It is on philosophy that art will have to wait for a design of action. If any grand strategy is found in nature, on which educators can rely, it is because there is a God behind nature, guiding and directing it. If the pupil senses that the world to be learned is problematical in character, it is because the Deity has so arranged the universe. Providence has ordained the cosmos so that solutions will be suggested. These solutions from the Catholic view have been made easy of access through supernatural revelation and a divinely teaching Church. So much is Catholic education based on this idea that is educational philosophy has come to be referred to as the Catholicism in education. It is an old article of Catholic faith that one must have faith

²³Robert R. Rusk, The Philosophical Bases of Education, pp. 65-66.

²⁴Herman H. Horne, Philosophy of Education, revised edition, pp. 297-298.

in order to understand. The weaknesses of human nature's equipment for learning, however, can be further strengthened by divine grace and revelations.²⁵

Professor James states that on pragmatic principles we can not reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it. Universal conceptions, as things to take an account of, may be as real for pragmatism as particular sensations are. They have indeed no meaning and no reality if they have no use. But if they have any use, they have that amount of meaning. And the meaning will be true if the use squares well with life's other uses.²⁶

True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification process; useful is the name of its completed function in experience. True ideas would never have been singled out as such, would never have acquired a class-name, least of all a name suggesting value, unless they had been useful from the outset in this way. From this simple cue pragmatism gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us toward other moments which it will be worthwhile to have been led to. Primarily, and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of "a leading that is worth-while."²⁷

²⁵Brubacher, op. cit., pp. 19-20, 29, 37.

²⁶James, Fragmatism, a New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, p. 273.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 204-205.

According to Brubacher's philosophy, the pragmatic theory of truth and the instrumental theory of intelligence have an exclusive monopoly on experimental learning. Therefore, experimental educational procedures merely uncover truth; they do not invent it. There is nothing creative as in progressive education. If the truth is hidden or obscure, it merely awaits drawing aside the veil of ignorance.²⁸ Just what the nature of any experience is, however, each teacher must find out for herself. This is fundamental in any philosophy of education. It must be remembered that only the pupil can learn his lesson. The ultimate nature of what is learned is an intimately private affair. Knowledge really consists in acts of knowing, in responses to the environment. Yet, until knowledge is put to work, it does not achieve the status of knowledge. It is mere data or information till reflected on and comprehended. The real curriculum is what children draw from the treasure-chest of the past to achieve the current purposes in solving problems; it is the curriculum in "action."²⁹

Pupil interest is made the arbiter of educational procedure. A fact will not have value to a child till it is related to other facts and oriented to some scheme of

²⁸Brubacher, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 65-68, 73-74.

things. Education must get its vision in what is, rather than in what ethical considerations dictate ought to be. The philosopher⁵ must take up the burden. From the raw materials of science, tradition, and opinion he must fashion the finished yardstick of values. The individual is frequently mentioned as the final educational value. This is not definite enough for others because the individual has such a plurality of interests as evidenced in the expanded modern curriculum. While education must prepare him for vocation, citizenship, and other duties, it is by none of these that the individual is to be permanently known. The individual as the final value in education is not always held to such a lofty level. According to educational philosophy, the individual's enduring worth is to be found in his soul achievement.³⁰ The soul instinctively strives for perfection and rejoices in its attainment.³¹ Brubacher's philosophy is, "Goals that are really valuable are never reached." Perfection itself, no matter how earnestly teacher and pupil strive for it, is not likely to be realized -- at least in this life.³²

James S. Plant, M. D., in his article, "The Psychiatrist Looks at Today's School Child," explicitly states

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 78-79, 86-89.

³¹ A. Tompkins, The Philosophy of Teaching, pp. 124-125.

³² Brubacher, op. cit., p. 94.

that American education is doing a good job on today's school child. We as teachers make the mistake of telling a child to hurry. The child in return looks up at us as much as to say, "I am hurrying."³³ The writer agrees with James S. Plant that a great many of our problems come from the fact that we use words full of meaning to us, but they are hollow shells to the child. We push our interests in generalization ahead of the child's specific experiences. The subject matter needs more realism and should become less mechanical. The psychiatrist sees so much mechanical teaching in the schools that he wishes the schools would start with the child's everyday problems. Then in keeping with pragmatic philosophy work from life experiences out into the field of history and literature.

Over the last generation there has been much criticism over the hollowness of purely academic learning and the "emptiness" of rote memory work. Teachers need to be shown the hollowness of mere ritual in their class work. Our schools need a flexible curriculum. Every classroom teacher needs to realize the importance of "bending the arrow" to meet the needs of her individual group. The battles for democracy will be fought out in our schools and classrooms.³⁴

Robert R. ~~Rusk~~ says that if we divide the human

³³James S. Plant, M. D., "The Psychiatrist Looks at Today's School Child," Educational Record, January, 1942, pp. 69-70.

³⁴Ibid., p. 70.

environment into natural or material, and psycho-social or cultural, and the former again into the physical and the technical, the latter into intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, and religious, we must conclude that any system of education which claims to be comprehensive must prepare the child to appreciate all these aspects, and that a system of education which ignores any one of these is necessarily incomplete.³⁵

Rusk maintains that if freedom is an ideal for the individual, it is a problem for the educator. He further adds, with a quotation from E. Boutroux, Education and Ethics:

The task of the educator is a strange one: to act on mind and conscience in such a way as to render them capable of thinking and judging of themselves, to determine initiative, arouse spontaneity, and fashion human beings into freedom. The work is as glorious as it is difficult; it is something of like nature with divine creation.³⁶

The writer agrees with A. A. Schoolcraft as expressed in his article, "Easier Ways to Better Schools," that teachers should teach more in terms of things, and less in terms of talk. Providing real experiences makes both the teaching and the learning easier and better. The enlightened teacher knows that pupils learn the ratio of circumference to diameter easily if they begin by measuring the waste-basket and making the computation, and then proceed

³⁵Rusk, op. cit., p. 109.

³⁶Ibid., p. 182.

through several similar performances to a generalization of their own, even if it is not exactly 3.1416. The benighted teacher would attempt to teach this relationship by means of a lecture or a text assignment. As the writer sees it, the former method would be more pragmatic than the latter. Such well-designed dealing with realities capitalizes on the best form of visual aids, and at the same time constitutes first-hand learning (learning by doing), which in many areas is, as a source of understanding, as superior to learning by mere listening or reading as sunbeams are superior to moonbeams as a source of heat and light.

In addition, teaching through dealing with realities evokes and sustains pupil interest far more effectively than predominantly verbal techniques. Keen interest is a sign of effective instruction. The proper function of the public schools is to help all pupils who enter them to become the best persons possible both as individuals and as members of society. This function can not be aided in any degree whatsoever by such procedures as "flunking," non-promotions, and expulsions. The public schools must be judged by what they do for, or to, all the pupils who have entered, not merely by what they do for the relatively small number who complete the twelfth grade.³⁷

Everett V. Perkins states in an article, "What Can't

³⁷A. A. Schoolcraft, "Easier Ways to Better Schools," Journal of Education, CXXVIII (April, 1945), 131-132.

Be Given," that teachers are interested in the effect of governmental paternalism upon the youth. Children do not learn to walk by being carried or by always being led by the hand. They learn by doing things themselves and not by having everything done for them. Youth acquire strength of body, mind, and character by meeting life's situations as individuals, or in voluntary groupings, not by running somewhere for help. The things most essential for our citizens and for the nation are manhood and womanhood. These can not be given but they must be achieved.³⁸

A. P. Wallace in his Pragmatism in the Modern School says: "Pragmatism comes out of human experiences."³⁹ The pragmatic method for the teacher to use is to experiment with some of the things that the children desire. If these as new ways of learning prove valuable, then she should adopt them. The new methods are "pragmatic" if they work. From these pragmatic determinants the writer's interpretation is that pragmatism seems to be reaching a peak in modern educational theory.

³⁸Everett V. Perkins, "What Can't Be Given," Journal of Education, CXXVIII (March, 1945), 90.

³⁹A. P. Wallace, Pragmatism in the Modern School, p. 8.

CHAPTER III

CONTEMPORARY CRITICISMS OF PRAGMATISM IN MODERN EDUCATION

Contemporary Criticisms of Pragmatic Philosophy

Dasil A. Smith expresses in his article, "Idealism, Pragmatism, Realism," in Educational Administration and Supervision, that the influence of pragmatism in education has been of real value. It has made us conscious of the need for some far-reaching changes in the prevailing educational philosophies, concepts, and practices. It has been the "band wagon" for the reformers and the critics. It has been instrumental in freeing the schools of some of the bad practices and concepts of the traditional schools, and thereby has helped to bring the child more nearly to the realization of his birthright. But as an educational value on which to base the operation and conduct of our schools, pragmatism has its weaknesses and its inconsistencies. For merely to believe in the "Articles of Faith" of the progressives published in 1918, that the school should be child-centered, based on activity, child-interest, and child-freedom, is to have criteria and ideals for school operation and therefore a philosophy. This paradox is

still officially unsolved.¹

Frederick S. Breed, in his article, "Has the Progressive a Monopoly on Democratic Education?" published in Education, says: "Progressive education must go pragmatic if it is to have a future."² Harold Rugg, in American Life and the School Curriculum, states: "The education set up must be one that will perpetuate the democratic culture."³ According to the old philosophy, loyalties and truths were handed down to the people by leaders in authority. According to the new, the people adopt whatever allegiances and accept whatever truths they discover for themselves.⁴

As expressed by Breed, John Dewey in Experience and Education criticized members of the progressive group for building too exclusively on individual values. Modern realism is sympathetic toward Dewey's bi-polar interpretation of his philosophy. The trend in human affairs at this moment is not in the direction of greater individual freedom, but better individual control. Liberalism in state and school means acceptance of the principles of authority.

¹Dasil A. Smith, "Idealism, Pragmatism, Realism," Educational Administration and Supervision, XXVII (January, 1941), 15-16.

²Frederick S. Breed, "Has the Progressive a Monopoly on Democratic Education?" Education, LX (October, 1939), 87.

³Harold Rugg, American Life and the School Curriculum, p. 265.

⁴Ibid., p. 271.

The attitude of tolerance so essential to liberalism and the democratic way of life derives its chief justification from the rights of others, their right to be heard, particularly, and imports into democratic social relations an essential note of duty and responsibility.

It is common for pragmatists in education to claim advantages for their philosophy as a foundation for education in a democratic state. It is not surprising that some should come to believe that pragmatism provides the only acceptable philosophy of democracy. The principal points in dispute between the pragmatist and the realist are traceable to differences in theory of knowledge.⁵

According to Dasil A. Smith, the pragmatist thinks that mind, idea and spirit are not the realities, but are only functions of reality -- living. Thus activity and experience become the real realities and the test of values lies in and is associated with experiences. If a principle, a policy, or a thing works, it is good; and pragmatism adopts only those principles, policies, and things which do work. Action is the motto and results are the thing, the end, and the truth. The whole body of truth is changing, not merely having an addition. The world is not one of law and order, but one of process and change, one of experience and activity, one of freedom, growth, and power.

⁵Breed, op. cit., pp. 88-91.

Thus, the pragmatist lives in a world that is full of vitality, and full of interest; a world that is a panorama of colorful action, ever changing and ever challenging.⁶

Merl Curtis, in his article, "American History and Democracy Today and Tomorrow," in Progressive Education, quotes John Dewey, who has recently said: "Unless democracy continues to solve new problems its end is in sight."⁷ Many of us, certainly, would agree that one of the major problems of American democracy is to develop techniques and programs for cooperation and for collectivism, which will enable us to cope with some of the new technological and economic problems without sacrificing all that is best in our individualistic tradition.⁸

Boyd H. Bode in his Progressive Education at the Crossroads maintains that the progressive school cultivates an atmosphere of activity and freedom which is all its own. It is a place where children go, not primarily to learn, but to carry on a way of life. It emphasizes freedom, yet it attaches major importance to guidance and direction. It places the individual at the center of the stage; it insists that intelligence must be permitted to operate

⁶Smith, op. cit., pp. 23-24.

⁷Merl Curtis, "American History and Democracy Today and Tomorrow," Progressive Education, VI (February, 1939), 99.

⁸Ibid., pp. 99-100.

freely. It holds that learning takes place through doing. The future will prove whether the passion for profound knowledge, so rare, and so fruitful, can be borne and developed as rapidly and as readily in democratic societies as in "aristocracies." "Knowledge is sound if things work out according to expectation."⁹

The outstanding characteristic of democratic philosophy, as expressed by Arthur B. Moehlman in Social Interpretation, is the value placed on personality and the importance of the individual as the instrument of the creative and appraisal processes. With its roots imbedded in the Christian tradition, democracy believes that the individual is significantly but not exclusively important in the scheme of cosmic evolution.¹⁰ William A. Yeager in Home-School-Community Relations, says: "Social change may be brought about not only through the 'bombardment' of ideas from within, but through the influx of ideas from without."¹¹

According to John S. Brubacher in Modern Philosophies of Education:

Progressive education is not progressive because it is making steady advance toward some definite goal but because it is growing in whatever direction a novelly emerging future renders most

⁹Boyd H. Bode, Progressive Education at the Crossroads, pp. 9-10, 15-20.

¹⁰Arthur B. Moehlman, Social Interpretation, p. 27.

¹¹William A. Yeager, Home-School-Community Relations, p. 17.

feasible. But the question arises, how is one to know when change and individual variation will lead to progress? Progress is after all, a value word. From the pragmatic point of view values are instrumental. They implement a person to gain ends. Progress occurs if these ends are achieved. The criterion of the progressive is always specific. As he has no final or fixed values, he has no general formula for total progress. It must be evident by now that education ends are not termini to the road of education, but that they are employed as means or instruments for finding the way. No way to education is the true way. Rather it becomes true. To the pragmatist, truth is to be conceived dynamically. What turns out to be true will depend on the aims or values with which one started. The truth the child learns will inescapably be affected by his purposes or aims.

This pragmatic theory of truth implies a very distinctive role for intelligence in the world order. In a shifting environment, intelligence implements one to make satisfactory adaptations, to use the old and familiar as a tool for subjugating the novel and contingent. It is the chief means of survival. Crucial in the pragmatic way of gaining truth is its methodology. As has been noted, a precarious universe sets the problem. Activities are overtly initiated in the precarious environment to see whether their consequences will square with those anticipated. Other activities are later undertaken to generalize the first results. Activities are necessary both to make education lifelike and to make life yield the truth.¹²

Critical Comments Modern Scientists Have Made About Pragmatism

Albert Schinz in his Anti-Pragmatism has expressed the fact that he did not protest against a pragmatic conception of life, but only against pragmatic philosophers. "Pragmatism" is only a new term to designate "opportunism" in philosophy. But pragmatism as revealing a certain state

¹²Erubacher, op. cit., pp. 328-330.

of mind in our present generalization has a profound significance. Pragmatism in its modern systematized form would scarcely have been possible in earlier times. But pragmatism, while fain to draw us far from the borthright way, is perhaps going to save us after all.¹³

Schinz further adds that William James himself, in discussing the importance of the revolution which pragmatism must introduce, has ventured, in the way of comparison, to recall the Reformation of the sixteenth century. If he means by this to suggest the conversion of the public at large to pragmatic ideas, the writer would submit that this has taken place long ago, and that our age is as pragmatic as it is possible for it to be. If he had in mind a reform in philosophy, he is perhaps not wrong. But one would like to hope that pragmatists be not regarded as modern Luthers and Calvins, but rather as the venders of philosophic indulgencies, who have preceded the true reformers and made them necessary. It is in America that pragmatism, as a philosophy, has been formulated in its boldest and most logical form. America, less trammelled than other countries by social traditions of all kinds, exhibits more distinctly with less alloy of heterogeneous elements -- the pragmatic spirit which is the modern spirit.¹⁴

¹³Albert Schinz, Anti-Pragmatism, Introduction, pp. x, xv-xvi.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. xvii-xix.

Schinz quotes James in the following quotations:

"On pragmatic principles we cannot reject any hypothesis if consequences useful to life flow from it."¹⁵ "The true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaving."¹⁶ Schinz gives this criticism: "An idea is not true or false in itself; it becomes so if it is expedient." He quotes from James:

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in facts and events, a process: The process, namely, of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation.

To James' philosophy Schinz remarks: "This is to say, in place of ascertaining and verifying the truth, philosophy decrees it."¹⁷

William English Walling in an article, "Can Socialism Be Identified with Pragmatism?" in Current Opinion, states that if William James is America's greatest philosopher and if pragmatism is his most important contribution to thought, the question is, can socialism legitimately claim the support of pragmatic philosophy? William English Walling in his recent book, The Larger Aspects of Socialism, tries to identify socialism with pragmatism. Walling tries to show

¹⁵James, Pragmatism, p. 273.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁷Schinz, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

that Marx and Engels, the founders of scientific socialism, were, in their own way, pragmatists. The man whom Walling accepts as the real prophet and exponent of pragmatist in its most significant aspect is Professor John Dewey. He writes:

Pragmatism, in its humanistic form, as formulated by Professor Dewey, has arisen largely from psychology and related studies. But the new tendency is world wide and may be seen equally well in the effort of many sociologists to give their science a basis independent of biology. Both by the psychologists and sociologists philosophy is brought down from the realm of abstraction and reduced to a view of life that can be used for the practical service of mankind -- and must inevitably be so used if the modern world of thought is not to be reduced to the utmost chaos and confusion.¹⁸

Josiah Royce of Harvard University, in "Some Psychological Problems by Pragmatism," in The Popular Science Monthly, states what pragmatism asserts about truth may be considered from the point of view of a general theory of knowledge, or of a metaphysic. But pragmatism itself especially emphasizes its relation to psychology, on the one hand, and to the recognized methods of empirical science, on the other. As quoted by Royce, Professor Schiller at the Philosophical Congress in 1908 at Heidelberg said:

What is most essential to Pragmatism is that it insists that the relations and values of the thinking process must be estimated in psychological

¹⁸William English Walling, "Can Socialism Be Identified with Pragmatism?" Current Opinion, LVI (January, 1914), 45.

terms. Success tests truth, and success is itself a matter of experience that can best be understood when it is defined psychologically.¹⁹

Royce maintains that another way of stating the essence of pragmatism is to insist, as Professor Dewey has so often done, upon the fact that the method which pragmatism proposes to apply to all problems is the method already used by the various sciences of experience. They employ "working hypotheses." They test these working hypotheses by comparison with experience. Pragmatism consists in the assertion that all propositions should be tested as the hypotheses of science are tested. Since pragmatism is especially interested in the psychology of the thinking process, a general psychology of thought, on a pragmatic basis, has been worked out by Professor Pillsbury. The contributions of Professor Dewey have also familiarized us with other accounts of the psychology of thought.²⁰

Professor Sedgwick Minot, in "Pragmatism in Science," published in Scientific American, refers as follows to some of the metaphysical questions which arise with regard to the fundamental assumptions of science: first, that there is absolute truth, which includes everything we know or shall know; second, that we ourselves are included in this

¹⁹Josiah Royce, "Some Psychological Problems by Pragmatism," Popular Science Monthly, LXXXIII (October, 1913), 394-395.

²⁰Ibid., p. 396.

absolute truth; third, that objective existence is real. Scientific men base their work upon a series of assumptions. Philosophy, ever a laggard and a follower after her swifter sister, has lately termed the scientific habit of work pragmatism and has taken up the discussion of it with delightful liveliness. "Let us acknowledge the belated compliment and continue on our way."²¹

Sedgwick has the following to say:

We think of science as a vast series of approximations and our task is constantly to render our approximations closer to absolute truth. We use our approximations as best we may, treating them in large part as if they were accurately true, yet, we remain alert to better them. This has long been the standard of scientific thought. It is the "pragmatic" attitude of mind, but its new name has not rendered it a novelty.²²

²¹Sedgwick Minot, "Pragmatism in Science," Scientific American, CIV (March, 1911), 287.

²²Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

John Dewey and his pragmatic colleagues have dominated, during the last fifty years, the theory and practice of American education. No candid observer can deny that since the turn of the century, pragmatism, or experimentalism, has played an important part in the development of American thought and education. Seldom in the whole course of Western history has a new philosophical orientation exerted such an immediate and persuasive influence in the intellectual, political, and educational affairs of its society.¹

Pragmatism, or experimentalism, has evoked this broad popular response, not because it is a "popular" philosophy in the sense that its insights are superficial. On the contrary, its leading ideas are now almost universally regarded by scholars as having important and lasting worth. No account of the intellectual developments of the modern period can ignore the contributions of the founders of pragmatism -- Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey. Thus Dewey has frequently affirmed that his own work was made possible

¹John L. Childs, "Experimentalism and American Education," Teachers College Record, XLIV (May, 1943), 539.

because of the foundations provided by the contributions of his colleagues -- Peirce, James, ~~and Mead~~. The brilliant analysis these ^{three} four leaders have made of many classical problems have long been a source of aesthetic enjoyment for the technical specialists in philosophy and have given them new intellectual perspectives of the utmost importance. For the pragmatist the activities of a schoolroom are as valid subject matter for philosophy as the movement of the heavenly bodies. It is only in a society which consciously aims at the good of all, and in which all share in making the common patterns of life, that intelligence can be really liberated. During the past decade this educational movement has been gaining in strength in all parts of the United States.²

The right of the individual to differ from accepted patterns of thought and procedure is protected by judicial review except during times of severe crisis. A certain tolerance toward diversity in point of view has been developed through the operation of the democratic ideals of "live and let live."

The purpose of democratic education is the development of well-integrated individuals who can live successfully in an ever-changing dynamic culture. The children must be able to see the problems arising in their own lives and

²Ibid., pp. 540-541.

in the social life. They must be able to solve these problems within the limits of their individual capacities and must be willing to take the steps necessary to achieve solutions. The democratic school is also required to indoctrinate individuals in the democratic tradition which in turn is based upon the agitative liberties of the individual and the needs of society. The adequate expression of the democratic educational process is the progressive teaching of children and adults, in terms of their maturity, to be open-minded, tolerant, and kindly toward the beliefs of others.

The outstanding characteristic of democratic philosophy is the value placed on personality and the importance of the individual as the instrument of the creative and appraisal process. The home, the church, the state, and the community successively and concurrently bring to bear upon the child during the period of immaturity all of the controls that society has developed to interpret group life. Progress is initiated through individual achievement and effort, but becomes effective only when the group accepts the new idea or practice. Examples are the successful history of the automobile and the radio.³

A flexible personality capable of adjusting intelligently to changing social need and practice is one of the

³ Moehlman, op. cit., pp. 11, 14-15, 27-28.

desirable educational outcomes. The professional educator's leadership influence in improving public education rests on his ability to create and to direct public opinion. Teachers often talk much about democracy, but, judging by attitude and action, appear handicapped through intellectual and emotional inability to reduce generalities and slogans to concrete practices.

The democratic school has the responsibility for teaching children and adults methods of thinking. Open-mindedness and ability to investigate and to consider all points of view before arriving at a reasoned decision grow out of knowing how to think. The professional's ability to keep ahead of the social procession is directed into purposeful channels and into recognition of current limitations, the whole a smooth-running process in which the operator always remains superior to and in control of the machine. The school must recognize its responsibility for improvement, a process that starts with the teacher and ends with the institutional product.⁴

Recommendations

The writer recommends that we should express our gratitude to the founders of pragmatism, Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey. For out of pragmatic philosophy modern

⁴Ibid., pp. 47, 79, 452, 459.

education has developed. And may we say with Professor James that "pragmatism has come to stay." Again, let us quote Breed: "Progressive education must go pragmatic if it is to have a future." Re-quoting John Dewey: "Unless democracy continues to solve new problems its end is in sight."

The school in action should represent a totality of instructional activities based on the larger needs of society and the individual and social needs of the child.

The public school must be reasonable in its demands upon both the community and the child and flexible in organization and method.

The educational process should not attempt to standardize, conventionalize, and condition the individual to a common form but should, through the development of personal taste, provide means for a possible social integration around generally desirable social purposes while encouraging individual freedom and choice in parameter areas.

Recognition of the fact that the greatest interpretative possibility of the school rests upon the base of the totality of its effectiveness in performing its task means that the internal program must be adjusted to child and social needs at all times.⁵

We live today in a strange new world: a world of

⁵Ibid., pp. 447-449, 452-457.

technological progress, expanded population, rapid communication, industrialization, and extreme personal mobility. Thus educators should seek to organize guidance in the community for child and adult welfare. From an educational standpoint the local social world is the fundamental unit of learning and teaching. It is the child's greatest educator.⁶

J. Paul Leonard, President of San Francisco State College, an educator in the field of progressive education, in his recent book, Developing the Secondary School Curriculum, makes the following recommendations:

We must build a program to teach the meaning of democracy so that we catch the idealism, enthusiasm, and loyalties of youth and tie them to the competencies necessary to make the principles of democracy operative.

Textbook teaching of the bare facts of the development of civilization does not supply the thrill of human endeavor sufficiently to catch the enthusiasm of youth.

The "meaning of democracy," as the term has been used, implies several things. First, it implies the meaning of two basic concepts of democracy, respect for individual personality and freedom of action. Second, youth should learn what violations of these principles actually mean in the lives of people today. Individual rights are being

⁶Lloyd Allen Cook, Community Backgrounds of Education, pp. 1-8.

suppressed, minority groups are being persecuted, selfish aggrandizement is curtailing the expression of freedom of action. Some people seem to be willing to use the "freedom of the press" to prevent the extension of individual rights to all people.

These examples of failure of our democratic system are part of the subject matter for teaching ideals and principles; if we fail to use them, we are doing little more in education than putting on a play where we weep over the plight of a poor unfortunate on the stage while real people are sitting on the outside freezing waiting for us to act.

We must teach the tools of social and personal living so that youth will be competent to discover new truths and to solve their problems.

The schools should give attention to the types of experience where skills are required. Today mathematics is becoming a reading, for more and more facts are being given to us through the use of statistical data. Reading for different purposes should be stressed, and pupils should learn how to prepare reports by many different methods. Training for listening grows in importance with our great dependence upon the radio, and training for observation will be necessary if we are to receive the full benefits

of television.⁷

Any system of education that trains boys and girls who are willing to pay the supreme price to preserve freedom for all men has not failed.

Let us remember that all learning is not academic. For Shakespeare finds "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything."⁸

⁷J. Paul Leonard, Developing the Secondary School Curriculum, pp. 544-549.

⁸William Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act II, sc. 1, ll. 16-17.

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