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From Epistemological Pragmatism to Educational Pluralism

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Abstract

Much of K-12 and higher education today reflects John Dewey's pragmatic vision of education. Pragmatism as an epistemology has utility such as the ability to solve real concrete problems; however Dewey's vision lacks comprehensiveness because it privileges scientific knowledge over other types of knowledge. Consequently, Dewey's epistemological pragmatism cannot accommodate all types of knowledge learners and their traditions. For schools to be inclusive of all learners today they must move away from Dewey's epistemological pragmatism and adopt educational pluralism.

Introduction

Across the twentieth century, epistemological pragmatism in the Deweyan tradition has been applied to deal with many educational and social problems. John Dewey had a pragmatic vision for American education to reconstruct society gradually gaining international support in the twenty-first century. In many nations, including China and Turkey, the hope was that education would bring about cultural reconstruction (Pappas & Garrison, 2005). There is obvious merit with epistemological pragmatism such as its "transformation of theory to practice and teaching students to be flexible and adaptive to ever changing conditions" (Khasawneh, et.al, 2014, p. 49). In addition, the emphasis on experiential learning has the potential to create service learning projects in schools between students and community has great importance (see Loewen, 1996).

At the same time epistemological pragmatism privileges scientific knowledge as an absolute (Bowers, 1987). Scientific knowledge is any knowledge acquired via the scientific method. This also includes

technological knowledge. As a result other valid ways of knowing such as inter-generational, traditional, i.e. non-scientific knowledge that learners bring with them to the classroom is overlooked.

Intergenerational knowledge is used interchangeably in this paper with the terms 'inter-generational knowledge', 'traditional ways of knowing' and is defined as that knowledge communicated and exchanged with elders, clerics, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and friends whose ages span different generation.

This knowledge is at one's cultural, racial, spiritual, sacred or religious core, and sometimes but not always is solidified at an early age, determines how one interacts with the world and is of both fundamental and life-long significance. Traditional knowledge is important because not only is it another valid way of knowing but it turns on the relationship of generations and the duties of elders and family (Bauerlein, 2009). In other words, it is family flourishing.

The inclusion of other ways of knowing is not a new concept in the

educational landscape. The importance of including the knowledge and understanding of parents as active participants on school councils has been to enhance the accountability of the education system to the authority of parents. For example in Canada, the Ontario Education Act (2010), Regulation 612 promotes and outlines the strategies and initiatives that school boards should initiate to communicate effectively with and engage regularly with parents in regards to the education of their children. They adopt the view that for education to be family flourishing, schools, programs and curricular should be informed by multiple knowledge types.

The recommendation is that Dewey's epistemological pragmatism be re-organized as educational pluralism. A pluralistic education is more authentic to reflect the diverse Western democracies that schools exist in compared to the current model of education that reproduces Dewey's pre 1916 conceptual framework of epistemological pragmatism (see Fallace, 2010). The conceptual framework of educational pluralism refuses to privilege one epistemology over another, offers parents a variety of choices that reflect their beliefs and their children's pedagogical needs, reduces the risk of majority domination or what Mill (1859, p. 9) called "the tyranny of the majority" and fosters democratic accountability, and finally educational pluralism makes everyone aware of the variety of viewpoints (see Berner, 2012).

Therefore, educational pluralism acknowledges and integrates the intergenerational knowledge perspectives of students, families, cultural and spiritual viewpoints; recognizes and includes other ways of knowing (see Table 1.0 for six examples of other ways of knowing) and how these inform particular customs and

behaviour— and in the exchange of ideas always takes account of scientific and other non-scientific traditions as legitimate ways of knowing.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is an epistemological enterprise, rooted in experience, constantly changing, and relative to what works (Knight, 2006). Unfortunately as a standalone philosophy it is grounded in a restrictive epistemology and does not account for other truths which are embedded in traditions and passed on via the intergenerational knowledge of elders, family, religious communities, and cultural groups. This is important because Western educational institutions reside in cultural and religious pluralistic realities and many students have been raised in homes and communities that represent these realities (Berner, 2012).

Dewey advocated a pragmatic education based upon rational thinking, reason and science and "this came to have increasing appeal for reform-minded educators" (Valk, 2007, p. 275). His pragmatic perspective of education has been realized not only in North America but also internationally. Dewey's pragmatic vision has asserted itself as a reliable and absolute way of knowing, scientifically informed, and is supposedly value-free. A scientific way of knowing is touted as the most reliable methodology to assist learners on the way to becoming educated and successful twenty first century citizens. This absolutizing of pragmatism leads students to doubt other traditions and arrive at different beliefs by empowering them to think for themselves (Anderson, 2014). While there is nothing inherently problematic with assisting students to think for themselves, this is largely an

individualistic progressive future oriented approach which ignores the collective values, histories and nature of groups that have time-honored intergenerational understandings, traditions and values passed down to their members and communities (Bowers, 1987).

However, Stone (2011, n.p.) disagrees that Dewey's pragmatism is prevalent in education today. Stone writes: "there is little presence of pragmatism—and of Dewey—in America's schools today because the traditional curriculum is wedded to an undertaking of standards and accountability which currently trumps most efforts for pragmatist inquiry" (Stone, 2011, n.p.). Stone advances her argument noting that "international competition couched in a rhetoric of neo-liberal globalization has led to a twenty-year education reform in which one course of study fits all students and such central ideas as present interests and experiences are considered superfluous" (Stone, 2011, n.p.). Similarly Pappas & Garrison (2005) agree that pragmatism in education has been stifled due to the standardizing neo-liberal agenda. Berner (2012) also admits that even though today's educators have been trained in Dewey's pragmatic pedagogies, school boards and governments require teachers to teach a more prescribed curriculum and to participate in high-stakes academic assessments.

It is unquestionably true that standards and accountability driven by high-stakes testing has diminished some of Dewey's pragmatist experienced based vision of learning. Although this in itself could be disputed due to ongoing reforms in education which has seen an increase and emphasis on inquiry and problem-based learning, and inquiry learning is rich in empirical scientific method grounded testing

which Dewey championed (see Comley, 2009). Nevertheless, it is Dewey's prevalent scientific epistemology, what the author describes as 'epistemological pragmatism' rather than the pedagogical application that is thriving in education today.

Epistemological Pragmatism Crossing Borders

Dewey's epistemological pragmatism has become popular in many countries looking to grow their economies as the scientific method informs educational policy and reforms. Epistemological pragmatism—adopted by an increasing number of countries and driven by the scientific method is anti-tradition. This has challenged learners who have essentialist beliefs as the corner stone of their identity (Papas & Garrison, 2005). This is because other ways of knowing are grounded in traditions and are drawn from essentialist beliefs which turns on the trust that members of a given group possess core characteristics that are both foundational to their identity and largely unalterable (see Shils, 1981).

Epistemological pragmatism has crossed borders into nations wanting to develop a new national consciousness and grow their economy. It has been adopted enthusiastically by nations to mark a radical break from traditions while building a scientifically modern nation (Pappas and Garrison, 2005). For example, Finland's downward slide on the international rankings in educational achievement has triggered reformers to move towards adopting a pragmatic philosophy of education. Finnish reformers propose to remove current traditional school subjects and make school learning more experiential and reflective of 'real life'. Finnish educators footnote Dewey's educational

vision for these future changes and they expect pragmatism as a dominant philosophy guiding both curriculum content and pedagogy to assist with the fiscal needs of the country (see Nelson, 2015).

Another example where the Deweyan pragmatic synthesis has been adopted as a strategy for economic recovery are found within the Hispanic world. For example, the adoption of Dewey's scientific methodology and pragmatic knowledge is hoped to lead Spain to modernization and nation building (see Pappas & Garrison, 2005). The impact that pragmatism had on the Hispanic culture, Europe and North America is having a modernization effect in the force of scientific knowledge as the standard to inform the ideal of progress (Pappas & Garrison, 2005). One important aspect to Dewey's pragmatic vision for education was to exploit a scientific epistemology as an absolute to truth (Marsden, 1997). To be educated one must place their trust in scientific knowledge and its methodology. In 2007 the US government's 'No Child Left Behind Act' was an appropriate case in point of a nation adopting and increasing its scientific-technological procedures to deliver high stakes testing. The NCLB Act instructs schools to "implement reform strategies informed by scientifically-based research...scientifically-based research utilizes measurements that provide reliable, valid data..." (NCLB, 2007, p.3).

Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why K-12 and higher educational institutions are closely managed by scientific standards and accountability as a valid, reliable and governing way of knowing. John Dewey's epistemological pragmatism is compatible with the scientifically literate learner today;

pragmatically educated chiefly for the benefit of the economy.

The scientific language common within educational policy and teacher 'speak' furthers the intrusion of epistemological pragmatism (Bowers, 2011). Students come to know what is true, real and of value in a "systemic and consistent manner and via the 'education system', through 'learning efficiency', and by 'critical thinking', leading to 'learning progress', and satisfactory 'educational outcomes' (see NCLB, 2007, p.3). This kind of discourse brings with it scientific/technological patterns of thinking that privilege progress to the detriment of tradition. For example, the normalization of abrupt change (always expressed in positive terms) in education as the inevitable consequence of progress (see Jerald, 2009). This is recognized in the values adopted by the Olympic motto: 'faster, higher, and stronger'. The motto promotes progress as a positive value to adopt within an environment of competition, performance, comparison and perfection. Only the strong will succeed in such an environment. Yet the motto ignores the value and rights of survival of the weak. As a result human beings are not shown the other side of being human. As Wang (2011, p. 1) states: "the Olympic motto is just a barbed rose, which not only brings beauty to human beings, but will also hurt the fingers of those who pick her flowers...". The weak, Wang (2011) suggests, have no other choice but to accept or resist this 'law of the jungle'.

The Olympic motto parallels pragmatic discourse in education. The emphasis on student performance and improved techniques and practices to elicit effective outcomes. The attention to technical and scientific innovation and the relationship that education has with a strong and competitive economy and industry. The

adoption of cutting edge scientific techniques for greater student and teacher performance, together with evidence based pedagogy, quality, reliability, value, service, and the cost and availability of educational products as a means for learners to become ‘faster, higher, stronger. Such discourse stimulates patterns of thinking which are dominated by images of performance, comparison and perfection as an unquestioned good. Consequently, traditions that value a different philosophy of life and are informed by ways of knowing that are not guided by science as an unquestioned absolute are regarded as an “intellectual disturbance, irrelevant, backward and obsolete” (Shils, 1981, p. 8).

Epistemological pragmatism adopts the similar thought patterns and expectations of the industrial revolution of the 19th century. This is important to note because this period in history thoroughly destroyed the family and the old manner of doing things (McLamb, 2011). The commitment to efficiency, the economy and the scientific method are all integral to Dewey’s pragmatic vision of education.

Education, Traditions and Pluralism

Although educators and curriculum policy document the importance and appreciation of pluralism, much of the argument has been about *people* of diversity only but has ignored a deep epistemological approach. One example is the University of Michigan Intergroup Relations Program (IGR), which merely fits in the presence of diverse others and the equality among its peers, but no deep perspectival approach to understanding the traditions of diverse others (see Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004). Dewey believed that “school is society” with a substantive interaction between the two (Weijia & Kaiyuan, 2007). Western society

is increasingly multicultural and with that comes different traditions and belief systems. Roald (2011, p.149) outlines the problem:

Whereas most nation-states today consist of more than one cultural community and can thus be said to be ‘multicultural societies’, very few societies are ‘multiculturalist societies’, in the meaning of cherishing and encouraging more than one cultural approach... the ideal of ‘multiculturalism’ is built partly on the Enlightenment ideal of individual rights and not collective rights... a notion which since the 1970s has been a strong underlying force in countries particularly in northern Europe, in the US, Canada and Australia.

When education privileges individual rights over and above groups who adhere to collective rights which are often intergenerational and respects family wisdom, education tends to rely exclusively on scientific or rationalistic forms as a tool for modernization and expects all its students to do the same without question—therefore it is bound to conflict with society and other traditions that reflect collective rights (Pappas & Garrison, 2005). Although educational reforms in Western societies highlight the importance of reflecting pluralism and promoting diversity and equality as individual rights (Roald, 2011), the political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1958) commented back in the late 1950s that society demands more often than not that its members “act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest” (p. 39).

Similarly, Lawyer Sheldon Chumir who led a campaign in the 1980s against alternatives in public schools, argued that

the public schools were “designed to mix children of different ethnic and religious groups and eliminate those differences” (Bateman, 1988, p. 8). The goal of education is uniformity not an appreciation of difference.

A Dewey pragmatic culture of learning is not sensitive to other cultural ways of knowing. To illustrate, Morgan (2006) notes that Japanese culture does not favor the Western ideals of opportunism and individuality but instead conformity and tradition. Dewey’s anti-traditional views do not draw seriously upon the knowledge, reality or value perspectives reflected by diverse learners of ethnic, cultural, religious difference who have ways of knowing that are not necessarily scientific or pragmatic. Here pragmatic is used in the philosophical sense based on the principle that the “usefulness, workability and practicality of ideas, policies, and proposals are the criteria of their merit” (Thayer, 2013, n.p). It stresses the priority of action over doctrine, of experience over fixed principles (see Although Western society is far more culturally, religiously, ethnically diverse than it is uniform, the adoption of Dewey’s commitment to scientifically informed pragmatism does not accommodate the diversity of knowledge, reality or values that traditions and cultures reflect and appreciate. This is one reason why Deweyan pragmatism as an epistemology has come into direct conflict with other traditional authorities in society (Pappas & Garrison, 2005).

Deborah Meier (1993) acknowledges the mismatch between school and real life. She suggests the following for consideration:

There are too many teachers as masters of a game which has very little resemblance to the game of real

life. While teachers tell students that school prepares them for life, the few similarities they do see between the two worlds are rarely put into practice in the school world. She also sees teachers lacking experience and reflection on what the 'real game' is. If this were not damaging enough to the image of teachers Meier outlines the regular public beating their vocation takes (Loewen, 1996, p. 16).

The idea and practice of a pragmatic vision of scientifically informed education is important, however, as is the case with any model, it has limits. Thiessen (1993) argues that although growth and self-realization of the individual is the aim of education, it is rooted in a Western cultural model that supports only individualistic thought patterns (see also Roald, 2011). Although autonomy, individualism, and self-actualization are important in a liberal education, some cultures and traditions see these as relatively unimportant (Shils, 1981). Moreover, although the unimpeded and unconstrained development of the mind is important, this is idealistic because it assumes absolute freedom which is not reality (Thiessen, 1993). The development of the mind, including Dewey’s ethnocentric views on culture and race (Fallace, 2010) *always* occurs within the context of a particular tradition and culture (Bowers, 2011).

We also should ask ourselves if education should have as its goal the liberalization of the learner from his or her past. To liberalize a person to move beyond their traditions as a way of knowing i.e. non-scientific traditions, that is to characterize the past and traditions as “limitations” from which they need to be liberated. Why view traditional ways of knowing in such a

pejorative way? Instead of being a limitation, it may be the case that non-scientific traditional ways of knowing are “healthy and actually broadens one’s horizons” (Thiessen, 1993, p. 232).

Finally, education does not occur in a vacuum, but inside other ‘institutions’ and traditions such as schools, family and society (Murphy, 1973, p. 5). A common one-size-fits-all education is disrespectful to minority groups (Callan, 1996). This charge was raised by Dei (1995) who argued that the lack of an inclusive worldview curriculum in Black/African-Canadian high schools was a serious flaw in the educational system. Dei recommended a more reasonable liberal approach to knowledge and pedagogic practices.

Educational Pluralism as a Comprehensive Education

Educators can build upon Dewey’s pragmatic epistemology but it must do so by broadening the vision to educational pluralism. If education is to be a respecter of individual persons and also the collective rights of different groups, a comprehensive framework is needed for drawing on other ways of knowing in company with but in addition to the scientific method. As the philosopher Mary Warnock (1975) argued, people hold to particular perspectives of reality and rather than conceal this from students they are entitled to engage with the framework that a teacher and other people adopt for understanding different types of knowledge and realities. Morgan (2006) suggests that there is “considerable value in adopting the standpoint of another stranger because we can see our own limitations in a refreshingly new perspective” (p.125). John Stuart Mill (1859) said that we must hear the best arguments from those we most disagree

with otherwise we think of ourselves as infallible.

The necessity of educational pluralism is implied by Berner (2012). She notes that because Western democracies are so culturally and religiously diverse, educational institutions should reflect this diversity and mirror a wide variety of epistemological beliefs and commitments. They would necessarily embrace religious, secular, philosophical, and pedagogical varieties. By doing so educational institutions would affirm both the dignity of diverse knowledge commitments and society’s interest in the nurture of the next generation (Berner, 2012).

The teacher could model this commitment as a critical thinker, especially because the teacher is after all a person themselves with a history and tradition (see Mill, 1859). Educators and students think about, make judgments and experience curricula not in an impartial neutral way but through different epistemological frameworks, or perspectives. This is what it means to be human—to have a point of view, to know and be embedded in one’s history and future, to be aware of other epistemological beliefs and why they are living options today, and to be so informed as to understand the ways these influence social and cognitive development. A respectful and informed education appreciates what a person comes to believe and accept as true is indeed a “complicated amalgam of what they bring to their education and what their education brings upon them” (Wolterstorff, 2002, p. 111).

A comprehensive model of educational pluralism exposes students to informed, critical conversations about the types of knowledge that guide the perspectives and decisions of others. As Lee, Yen & Aikenhead (2012, p.2) suggest, “a

science teacher who appreciates a student's perspective will likely anticipate that some ideas found in a science curriculum may appear plausible to the student, while others may not". Questions and controversies are ideally encouraged in dialog within a pluralistic education as students are exposed to and ask questions about the different interpretations they have concerning the disciplines.

An anticipated objection to educational pluralism is the possibility that learners may in fact interpret the data so differently that conversations between learners become incommensurable and meaningless (Lees, 2011). However, here presents an opportunity for the educator to utilize the skills necessary to demonstrate to learners *how* people arrive at their conclusions using varied knowledge types i.e. historical, mathematical, aesthetic, spiritual, indigenous and acknowledge that some perspectives may challenge others. What is important here is not agreement but instead understanding (Stojanov, 2011). As Nord (n.d, par. 8) highlights:

Not all cultures and intellectual traditions and academic disciplines are compatible with each other; there are tensions and conflicts, as well as continuities and complementarities, among them. It is not enough, if our goal is critical thinking, *simply* to introduce students to various cultures, disciplines, intellectual traditions, in turn, like items on an academic cafeteria-line. A good liberal education will initiate students into an on-going *conversation* about how to sort out the contending views. This is the *Socratic* nature of a liberal education: we seek truth and

goodness through conversation (Nord, n.d, p.8).

If educational pluralism is realized then teachers and students must become co-learners. Nord suggests that students will "liberally educate teachers because teachers are learners too" (Nord, 2010, p.114).

Educational pluralism signifies what Alasdair MacIntyre believed an education should signify—"a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict in which a central responsibility would be to initiate students into conflict" (Nord, 2011, p. 111). In other words educational pluralism represents the messy and realistic nature of learning in a democracy (see Mill, 1859). Diekema, (2000) argues that "without such tension and dialogue, education will not progress but regress, because when such tensions cease to exist the educational community is either dying or in a chaotic state" (p. 40).

Finally, the goal of educational pluralism is to draw on the cultural richness and creativity inherent in multiple perspectives. As Viri (2003) writes, "this is a key to our collective advancement as human beings for a harmonious world future. Educators must invest wholeheartedly in our diversity and multiple perspectives—celebrating and nurturing them—not trying to reduce what we teach and learn into a dull social and intellectual monotone" (Viri, 2003, p. 62).

The Benefits of Educational Pluralism

What is described as educational pluralism gives meaning to varied realities that encourage individuals and groups to live their lives in harmony with their deepest beliefs about what gives meaning and purpose to life (see Galston, 2002; Thiessen, 1993). Since Dewey also believed that a

worthwhile education is concerned for individuals and community through the stimulation of the child's powers to act as a member of a unity, the learner would conceive of herself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which she belongs (Dewey, 1897).

However as conscious beings, educational pluralism understands that persons are not socially or culturally bound by the ideals of others but have the capacity to express their beliefs and for others to understand and take their views seriously, although not necessarily as factual (Stojanov, 2011, p. 166). This would take account of other ways of knowing in conjunction with the scientific by drawing on intergenerational knowledge to answer non-scientific, i.e., moral questions, and also scientific questions (see DeNicola, 2011).

Educational pluralism emulates the contemporary pluralistic reality and diversity of Western society and privileges no one way of knowing. It is a respecter of all persons, and an initiator of people into a community of critical 'inside' perspectives that reflects no one ideal of life. Educational pluralism is vital for teachers and ultimately their students to practice if they are to graduate as knowledgeable, empathetic, inclusive, tolerant, alert and educated persons.

Educational pluralism is a respecter of persons as it commits to a perspectival approach to knowledge, reality and value. It draws on understandings from a broad and comprehensive application of knowledge types and living traditions from people who live and breathe their traditions. This involves school students, parents and most importantly local community involved in the education of children as learners. As Loewen (1996, p. 30) notes "...those with

the most to offer about the real world are not in the schools, but out in the community".

The recommendation to embrace a model of educational pluralism is reinforced by the educationalist and philosopher John Portelli (1996). He writes that an inclusive education benefits educators to portray *humility*. If educators desire their students to be critical thinkers, they must recognize that one can never be expected to divorce oneself from one's point of view but rather draw on and learn from the perspectives of other traditions and intergenerational knowledge that others value to make sense of the world. The living traditions that learners bring to the classroom are meaningful to them, and these must attract the respect and inclusion often championed by educators and curriculum developers. Educational pluralism includes other knowledge types, values and realities by including traditional and contemporary perspectives to enhance curriculum, and the student's ability and understanding to incorporate her knowledge to understand other people and their claims which are different to their own.

Difference Celebrated

A comprehensive and hospitable education must also solve real-world problems and leave the impression that educational theory and practice are important for resolving some of the ills that continue to distort an understanding of diversity and tolerance. Educational pluralism will not overlook these deep questions that divide us because it promotes equity and the understanding of diversity (see Callan, 1996, p. 286).

Consequently, Sheldon Chumir was mistaken when he supposed that public schools were designed to mix children of different ethnic and religious groups and eliminate those differences. Although

members often forgo their differences at school and focus only on what they have in common, to concentrate only on what persons have or should have in common is to strip people of their identity as persons with different traditions and histories. This sets up a false dichotomy, for education can be a respecter of both unity and individual difference. Pearcey (2004) notes that the modernistic Western practice of education suffers from a fragmentation that creates these false dichotomies, which then affects every aspect of life, particularly ethics. Educational pluralism celebrates different ways of knowing as it orientates learners to the living stories of how people make sense of the world. This gives space for learners to participate in those different stories (Taylor, 1989). Moreover, the stories themselves can be interpreted differently because nobody is ever the same as anyone else (Arendt, 1958). A celebration of difference includes different knowledge types. An education that acknowledges different ways of knowing requires an eclectic model of education which can cohabitate fruitfully with Dewey's pragmatic scientific vision.

According to Dewey learners should be autonomous and problem-solving who are committed to exploration and evaluation. In fact he understood the importance of discerning from what lies *behind* a person's stated views and he noted that educators have failed to do this well. The hope for a Dewey vision of education is for a more active co-operation between representatives of different epistemologies. A similar position is taken by Volf (2014, par.25) when he argues that "people from diverse perspectives cannot engage each other in a meaningful way because they have never mastered the art of conversation about alternative accounts of what makes life worth living and what values should guide it". Discerning what lies *behind* a person's

stated values is of utmost importance because "we all tend to view and evaluate the disciplines [others] through our own prejudices and insecurities" (see Peters, 1977, p. 175).

This conversation was active in the 1970s when the British philosopher of education R.S Peters argued for a broader educational conversation that included listening to other voices regarding educational problems. As Peters clarifies: "I am convinced that curriculum projects would benefit if people representing different perspectives on education problems were involved constructively in devising them..." (Peters, 1977, p.174). Although he endorsed a common education it was an education that promoted reasonableness. The practice of 'reasonableness' in education is best expressed by Callan (1996, p. 279):

The exercise of reasonableness presupposes a deliberate setting in which [learners as] citizens with conflicting values and interests can join together to create a morally grounded consensus on how to live together.

This sets the stage for an integrative position to widen the current K-12 and higher education curriculum to carry forward a broad education which would embrace a person's traditions seriously as a learner and most importantly as a person. The curriculum would take difference seriously by serving to represent and integrate the epistemological perspectives that persons have of each core discipline. This mirrors the pluralistic reality of contemporary Western society to which education must reflect.

An educated person must understand the influence that traditions have upon

economic, political and social structures (Narayan, 2013). Because we disagree so deeply about the merits of various ways of making sense of the world and our lives, it is even more important that learners be introduced to a variety of pluralistic alternatives if they are to be knowledgeable so as to think critically (Nord, 2010). To offer students only one way of viewing the world and one version of knowledge borders on indoctrination through uniformity. Uniformity breeds indoctrination of the worst kind, because it is implicit and unacknowledged (Berner, 2012). Uniformity is uncritical and minimizes the autonomy of learners, both of which are pre-requisites for an educated person (Peters, 1977).

Redesigning Educational Curriculum to Reflect Educational Pluralism

To create and maintain a civilized democratic society, all people are active participants in educational matters (see Mill, 1859). The challenge is how to maintain the national societal identity as part of people's traditional identities which has been formed by their families, communities and culture (see Khasawneh et.al, 2014). How can schools maximize the involvement of other ways of knowing and include intergenerational knowledge so that programs and curricular are meaningful, educationally robust and make an impact? How can educators reach an understanding that intergenerational programs are the next logical step in education reform? School curriculum requires wide-ranging reform for a new paradigm of comprehensive learning. What is recommended is the presence of educational pluralism that embraces contributions from students, teachers, families, caregivers, and community which then direct curriculum in meaningful ways. Although the general broad liberal education is retained, that is,

reading, writing, science and mathematical knowledge and skills, there is now space for the living traditions and perspectives of learners, families and communities. Flexibility, choice, consultation with parents, community and leaders with the goal of personalized learning are valued as twenty first century educational initiatives. The plan would acknowledge a broad epistemology which draws on the traditional institutions of school, community and family. Learners, families and community members are expected to play a more active role in designing educational curricular. If this broader view of knowledge does eventuate, this would be a significant '[ontological turn](#)' in education. The proposed plan lends itself well to educational pluralism that respects the learner, family and community and provides a comprehensive, generous and broad education.

Educational pluralism provides students with a wider and richer learning experience as they are exposed to a greater understanding of knowledge types, how this informs people's decisions and goals in life, i.e. reality. Educational pluralism retains its compulsory ideal of learning the basics, and this is important because a voluntary system would hinder and disregard those people who, because of a disadvantaged home background, do not have the parental support, encouragement or indeed the inclination (Peters, 1977). Educational pluralism is sensitive to a different ways of knowing, values and realities and reflects the vision of an educated person as "characterizing the all-round development of a person morally, intellectually and spiritually" (Hirst & Peters, 1970, p. 24).

Educational pluralism enables learners to understand how traditions rest on a network of interlocking assumptions about

knowledge, value and reality. Learners begin to “get a clearer understanding of the pluralistic i.e. knowledge, value and metaphysical assumptions, to which we all seem so uncritically committed without challenge” (Hirst & Peters, 1970, p. 11). Finally, educational pluralism has the potential to humanize learning by attaching itself to a larger social, traditional and historical significance.

The Pragmatics of Educational Pluralism

By means of educational pluralism learners are introduced to a particular topic from other ways of knowing and from *within* a particular perspective. For example, post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, pragmatism pluralistic, Indigenous, and religious are all traditions that can be integrated as ways of knowing (see Creswell, 2009, p. 7 and Table 1.0). The teacher aims to encourage students to reflect critically and humbly from the different perspectives to which they are exposed. This type of inclusive education initiates learners into a knowledgeable understanding of human civilizations. It understands that the child is not a solitary individual in the world, with everything else as mere context. Rather, to be a human being is to be part of the company of other people in community. The school is a project of, by and for that community. As Nord (2010) states:

A liberal education has, then, four dimensions—breadth, depth, inside understanding, and historical perspective—all connected by way of an ongoing critical conversation. Each of these dimensions of a liberal education gets at a *dimension of reality*, conveying to students something of its *richness*; illiberally educated students are in danger of

developing a much narrower, impoverished, understandings of reality”.

The fundamental mission is to make education truly inclusive and to help every learner develop an awareness of the richness of learning from other perspectives besides one’s own.

Reforms must begin with school-person-community apprenticeships with others outside of the school. An apprenticeship model would reflect experiential learning and would involve a representative person i.e. teacher, coach, tutor, mentor or master, someone who is deeply invested in the future of their “craft”, who would educate the young person in matters important to the family or community and properly learned in the environment of the representative. The aim would be to increase the intellectual and personal development of the young person. Loewen (1996, p. 13) suggests that “adults with mastery in various crafts, talents and habits of mind can revitalize these aspects if we can recruit a significant number of them into our schools”. Because this process is a long and active one invested in deep understanding and demonstrable learning, to do this properly it is safe to say that schools will need to tolerate the “unpredictable pace of learning, the variance of teaching methods and variety of learning” that will result (see Loewen, 1996, p. 11).

An apprenticeship model of learning can assist young people to understand perspectives, skills and knowledge that is often outside of their own thinking about learning and tradition. An apprenticeship model lends itself well to Senge’s vision of what he describes as a ‘systems thinking approach’ (see Senge, 2009). Senge maintains that people learn together

interacting with one another and not in isolation within abstract systems. This is especially important today since we live together in an increasing smaller world. Knowledge is always embodied in a person and so ‘systems thinking’ suggests Senge (2009) allows one to see a holistic systemic view of education and learning. This requires educators and learners to triangulate with different people, from different points of view, who are seeing different aspects of a topic to come together and collectively start to see something that individually none of them see is often the outcome. Although the apprenticeship model and ‘systems thinking approach’ positively echoes Dewey’s vision for experiential learning, the apprenticeship model described here is a departure from the scientifically informed pragmatic views of Dewey as an absolute way of knowing and learning. This is because there must be a concern for understanding the different values underlying the different modes of awareness such as the values reflected in the moral, interpersonal, religious, mathematical, scientific, and historical. There must be a concern for the values that underlie types of knowledge because the educator should “have a respect for truth *and* for persons” (Peters, 1977, p.29, 155).

Six Alternate Plural Perspectives

When students are initiated into school curriculum they must first recognize what the alternate perspectives are for the propositions that are assumed as factual within the curriculum. Creswell (2009, p. 6) notes that thinking through the philosophical assumptions that are presupposed in the disciplines and also the presuppositions that one brings to their study is simply good methodology. Creswell lists four particular plural perspectives for consideration. These could be used to begin a conversation. These

include: post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism.

In Table 1.0 these four plural perspectives are expanded to include Indigenous and religious perspective. A religious perspective can mean the traditional world religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. Concerning the Indigenous perspective it is important to note that there is no one Indigenous perspective but rather perspectives; however the spiritual nature of learning and holistic view of education is universal. The same is true concerning a religious perspective/s which is influenced by denomination, culture and history.

The two additional perspectives are considered live options in contemporary democratic society. For example, Brewer (2007) notes that religion is not a private experience but is of public importance with an increasing resurgence within society. Battiste (2013) argues that education has begun to recognize a revitalized knowledge system which incorporates both Indigenous knowledge and Eurocentric thinking.

Table 1.0 Six Perspectives

Postpositivism	Constructivism
Determination	Understanding
Reductionism	Multiple participant meanings
Empirical observation and measurement	Social and historical construction
Theory verification	Theory generation
Advocacy/ Participatory	Pragmatism
Political	Consequences of actions
Empowerment	Problem-centered
Issue-oriented	

Collaborative	Pluralistic
Change-oriented	Real-world practice oriented
Religious	Indigenous
Spiritual or supernatural	Spiritual or supernatural
Holistic	Holistic
Truth seeking/servant oriented	Tradition-historical
Tradition-historical-redemptive	Community oriented/collective responsibility/intergenerational

Using the conceptual model of educational pluralism learners are cognizant of the foundations and presuppositions embedded in the traditions and understand how different traditions interpret knowledge, shape reality and construct value. Educational pluralism assists learners to consider realities from alternative perspectives, from the view of the Other. Such an education “de-centres, it points away from the narrow-mindedness of one truth, to a direction of broader orientations” (Roebben, 2009, p. 15).

For example, curriculum might examine the question: ‘what is education when considered from an Indigenous or post-positivistic perspective?’ Dewey understood that education should reflect what society wants, consequently this vision reflects the diversity of contemporary society which includes many ways of knowing. A comprehensive education using the six worldview perspectives would better reflect the pluralistic realities of today’s classroom and consequently be a family flourishing as a respecter of all persons in collaboration.

Conclusion

If education is to reflect democracy as John Dewey believed it must, a comprehensive education that draws on other ways of knowing in deep and meaningful ways must be realized. Education and curricular must be open to understanding, not necessarily committed to agreement, but informed about alternative ways of making sense of knowledge, the world and the values that people have about life and why (Nord, 2010). It must hear from individuals and groups of people who really believe and live their beliefs. This requires an education that is sufficiently comprehensive to initiate all learners as stakeholders in their education into a tolerant and comprehensive model of system.

The Western educational system can play a significant role in developing and establishing a type of learning institution equipped to produce the sort of society which honours and cherishes the best of humankind. Educators and curricular must adopt a broad and generous epistemology that includes different types of knowledge systems, realities and values. Policy makers must therefore adopt a diversity of realities and epistemologies in schools, which are currently absent, and declare their commitment to educational pluralism (see Berner, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2002).

Educational pluralism gives learners and educators a new way of seeing, a new vision for a modern way of educating. Unless the learner has gained some all-round understanding of other ways of knowing besides the scientific, Dewey’s pragmatic education by itself is reflective of elitism and uniformity. Here upholds the importance of criticizing taken-for-granted views of education that pretend to be

ideologically neutral but serve only the privileged (Katz, 2010).

One indication of an educated person is that as a result of their education they see the world differently. When learning is implemented by way of educational pluralism, students can make broad and deep learning connections that challenge their worldview traditions and long held assumptions about what is worth knowing. Van Manen (1991, p.48) argues that teachers must be sensitive to the “backgrounds, the life-histories and the particular qualities and circumstances of the children for whom they have responsibility”. Unfortunately, “educators are often less interested in what learners need than in what they are able to endure” Van Manen (1991, p.54).

Students must be exposed to the inherent taken-for-granted assumptions embedded within the different disciplines by the application of educational pluralism. This is not difficult to do because each discipline already has its own distinct metaphysical and epistemological view of what is worth knowing. However, the difference is that educational pluralism requires learners to remove themselves from established and privileged thought patterns and compare competing truth claims with their own and then decide for themselves which ones or one corresponds best to reality (see Mill, 1859).

The argument for educational pluralism is that adequate attention is paid to grasping the varied modes of experience and knowledge which are independent and intimately interrelated within one’s tradition. Learners are not ‘blank slates’, an expression about the learner that John Locke made famous, but rather come to school with rich traditions and a distinctive view of reality. Educational pluralism draws on the

traditions of learners and the different ways of knowing and helps students understand the types of knowledge embedded within particular traditions and how these assumptions even influence politics and social structures.

The additional benefit that educational pluralism would have on the learner is to cultivate tolerance with a greater capacity for achieving the goal of helping others to understand what is different. Phillips (2014) suggests that children who are saturated in a true pluralistic education can be oriented to love the good, the true, and the beautiful on a pre-cognitive and affective level. Educational pluralism can help us *be* more than what they help us *do* and so learners are not regimented, alienated or stifled of their initiative (Peters, 1973).

In conclusion, and in relation to preparing teachers to teach in variable contexts, if education is a communal enterprise and has as its goal to “ensure a healthy diversity of perspectives needed for a morally healthy and continually renewing society while still allowing opportunities to converge on a common sense of unity and purpose” (Viri, 2003, p. 62) the most effective and sensitive means to achieve this would be by way of educational pluralism.

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