



The Conceptual Meaning of Experience in Dewey's Educational Philosophy

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1. Introduction

John Dewey was one of the most influential American philosophers and educators. His name was associated with the movement of "realism", a philosophical movement that was born in America in the second half of the 19th century. It covers a time period immediately after the American Civil War up until World War II [1]. Some of the versions are also known under the names of "instrumentalism" and "experimentalism" [2]. Pragmatism was born by the attempt to give an answer to the basic principles of rationalism and empiricism, philosophical currents that tried to give answers to the problem of the source of knowledge [3].

The main feature of the philosophy of pragmatism is the empirical concept. It accepts that the human experience is the ultimate source and the trial of all knowledge and values. The main pragmatic maxim, as formulated by Dewey argues that the value of each concept, each knowledge, as well as the meaning of each proposal lies on practical consequences [4]. The choice of operation versus the theory can be seen in the way pragmatists define knowledge. For example, Dewey said that if we could understand that knowledge is not an act of an outer viewer, but of someone who participates in the natural and the social scene, then the true object of knowledge lies on the consequences of the guided action. So, says Dewey, "the criterion of knowledge is located in the method used to ensure the consequences and not in metaphysical conceptions of the nature of the real." Dewey noted the relationship between education and experience, and declared his belief that every genuine form of education is born of experience. To paraphrase the famous dictum of Lincoln for Democracy, argued that education features is "from experience, for experience and through experience" [5].

2. The role of experience in constructivist epistemology of John Dewey

Center of Dewey's philosophical interest is the "theory of knowledge". He rejects the term "theory of knowledge" and prefers the term "theory of inquiry", or "experimental logic", as conditions more representative of his approach. The purpose of knowledge is to induce changes in different empirical situations; to investigate whether the knowledge gained is true or false, to propose and establish the "pragmatic theory of truth." The truth of acquiring knowledge is a function of the practice of operating its consequences. That means if this knowledge has a practical benefit, it is useful and true. If, however, knowledge has no benefits at a practical level, then there is a need for further research [5].

Dewey, influenced by Hegelian philosophy, supports the dual aspect, namely the subjective and inter-subjective dimension of the reconstruction of knowledge, highlighting the inherent and continuous interaction between man and his experience with the social environment. According to him, the human experience considered as a special type of interaction with the environment in which the one side defines and shapes the other and simultaneously it is shaped by it, opening up possibilities for new forms of coping with the situations and forming of activities. In formulating these positions, he attempts to remove the division between the subject and the object, theory and practice, of rationalism and empiricism. The knowledge is never final, and subject to constant criticism can lead to revision. This process as a whole is what is called critical thinking, which relates the value system. Knowledge does not come directly from experience but from the mental processing. With the simultaneous introduction of the concept of conciliation and experience, he supported the construction of a new reality with the action of any person [5]. According to Dewey's philosophy, knowledge does not refer to an external, independent and subjective reality, but it actively participates and it is shaped in practice, with particular connotation in learning as a dialectical process that integrates the experience and the concepts of observation and judgment through knowledge and not simply as a process with a beginning, middle and end. The experiential learning is making a two-way connection between what you act on things and what we enjoy or suffer thus by things. The initiator of the position «learning by doing» says "everything is an experience that is due to a reconciliation that takes place between a person and what at the time is the environment» [6, 5].

It is worth mentioning the central role of experience in the process of learning and cognitive development. Dewey, by placing the experience base of the pedagogic process, defines it as "knowledge-based practice" meaning that we experience a situation first, then act in this either intellectually or practically. The culmination of this intellectual activity or practice is knowledge. Experience is the result of continuous interaction between humans and the environment. This is the main feature of the experience. At this point it is obvious the influence of the philosophy of Darwin in his theory of evolution. He configures a specific conception of experience, which includes action, pleasure and learning by experience (undergoing). In this broad view he has for the experience incorporates the cognitive experience, is something that derives from it and predisposes. Dewey makes a distinction between a primary and a secondary experience. The primary experience is composed of material interaction with the physical and social environment. For Dewey things are, as he says in *Experience and Nature*, the objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things



had before they are things cognized. The secondary experience is a reflective experience that makes the environment and its things as objects of reflection and knowledge. It is the failure and uncertainty of the primary experience that gives rise to reflective thought and learning [7]. The challenge for Dewey is to set up the disparate experiences into a functional whole.

3. The effect of epistemological philosophy of Dewey in modern educational theory and practice

From the late 19th century in both Europe and America developed a strong "criticism of the old school and put the goals for New Education» [8]. The educational ideas of Dewey had such a significant impact on educational thinking globally, so the view that was expressed was that no educator since Comenius was more recognized internationally than Dewey and any no one else's projects were so much translated around the world [9].

Dewey contrasts the traditional form of education with a more modern approach of the educational process, which includes a pervasive pattern of experience. The contrast between the two forms of education is strongly emphasized and he concludes that there is a close and necessary link between education and experience [10]. He defines learning as the process that extracts meaning from experience and argues that the meditation experience is a key element of the learning process. The methodological principle of learning by doing is the essence of the educational thought of Dewey, highlighting the experience as the dominant method of approximation of reality and knowledge of things. According to Dewey [11], the experience transfers the principles connection and organization of information or stuff from which it is made of within itself. The crucial point, therefore in order for the behavior to be explained or predicted is the meditation of personal experience. In order someone to create behavior with incentives; they should create the experience of awakening (stimulation), commitment and pursuit. For Dewey, the reflection is the starting point for the action and he aims to help the person get out of their deadlock, resolving problematic situations. He says that meditation is associated with the "evaluation of the reasons I believe a person", i.e. the process of rational examination of conclusions which our beliefs have been justified with [12, 13].

John Dewey tries to bring the educational process to a new basis. He is radically opposed to the traditional philosophy of education, based on prefabricated materials courses. This, in his opinion persistence of ready knowledge of the past, does not seem to offer something extra, it is not enough to solve the problems faced by the education system. The method of problem solving, the "project" method and the active method actually help in this direction. All that is necessary to operate in a specific context which is defined by Lindeman, as follows: "We can not start from the knowledge of various objects with the idea that the future can be helpful in this knowledge. The facts and information use from different knowledge areas but not with the logic of accumulation, but with this problem solving» [14]. He introduces a new empirical philosophy at school, where every experience creates a genuine form of education. The issue, however, that troubles him is to separate the experiences with positive and creative value with those that are negative, as he emphasizes that not all experiences have positive educational value. Thus, experience and education are not strictly related. The school must provide students with experiences that are carefully selected and in that way guided so as to prepare in the most appropriate way the students for their future life and provide a solid basis for future relevant experiences they will gain within society.

4. Conclusions

Approaching the concept of experience that Dewey identifies that an experience is always what it is, because for its duration a transaction occurs between the individual and what that moment is the person's environment. By adjusting the above position in the education, he argues that to learn from experience is a realization of a bidirectional connection between what you act on things and what we consistently enjoy or suffer from things. In this way he gives the experience a twofold existence: it is simultaneously has both an active and a passive element and in some special way (almost inaccessible to mind) the experience manages to combine harmoniously both components: from the active side, the experience is experiencing (trying) and from the passive side is affected (undergoing). When something becomes an object of our experience, we act on it, do something with it and then undergo or suffer the consequences. This is the curious combination. The linking of these two phases of experience is the measure of effectiveness or its value, since the simple activity is not an experience [15]. Dewey eloquently describes the nature of experience and the responsibility of the school to select and organize them, since it aims at a substantial education: no experience is born and dies alone. Completely independent of desire and will, every experience lives in the next experience. Thus, the central problem of education, based upon the experience, is to choose the kind of those experiences which survive productively in the next experiences. Interesting is his theory of the role of school. The school is not about the student's assimilation. The opposite: it should be emerging as a means for the renewal of society. In this way, we realize the special importance that experience acquires in the educational activity, shifting the center of the learning process to the students' experiences. So, every learning activity should be based on the experiences and the interests of the student who 'gets learning on its hands.



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