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"Some Major Contributions from Pragmatism to Philosophy of Education"

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Background

Traditionally, aims and most convenient means for education have been subject of discussion. Along with this, educational aims and means have found their origin in specific philosophical proposals. The educational proposal of American pragmatism meets both trends.

This work, that is included in the broader topic of my PhD project, focuses on a specific period in the history of American philosophy in which it came to maturity. A period that assists to the emergence of Pragmatism in the middle of a major implosion of philosophical discussion in the country, so much so, that is known as the "Golden Age" of American philosophy. Between two great points in American history -the Civil War and the Great Depression-, and after clarifying the "map" of the different schools and authors, I'll analyse the educational debates and outputs that, as a consequence of the new philosophical assumptions, were originated at the time.

Although this paper is not intended to address the full range of old and new pragmatist movement, it is undeniable that this contribution is in the current ascendancy of interest in philosophical pragmatism. In 1993, Richard J. Bernstein, director of the Department of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York, delivered a conference in Madrid in which he reviewed the latest philosophical production in his country. The conclusion is ahead in the title of his lecture (and previously published): "The Resurgence of Pragmatism". There are several and relevant works addressing theoretical recovery and reevaluation of pragmatism. Since the early 1980s, contributions of V. O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, and Richard Rorty, are good examples of it. These scholars and classical works of American pragmatists will put us on the road to discover the root of education that comes from pragmatic proposals.

Research Questions

This research paper has two main focuses or objectives:

Firstly, to conceptualize philosophical and scientific assumptions, which lead to the emergence of American pragmatism turning the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Pragmatism tries to develop an integration of knowledge and values. This proves certain historical antecedents in Descartes, Kant, Spinoza and others, although in the past the problem was drawing a boundary between Reason and Faith. Pragmatism represents science and moral ideals in one coherent and integrated interpretative outlook.

And secondly, to analyse the educational debates and consequences that, as a result of the new philosophical assumptions, were originated at the time.

Pragmatism is, mainly, a theory of knowledge: it tells us how and under which conditions knowledge can be achieved. Any theory of knowledge determines what can be learned and how can be taught. The specific nature of pragmatism will show education processes as ways of inquiring and valuing reality, as forms of action subjected to environmental contingencies.

Methods

The history of philosophy of education, invites to combine approaches. The result is that instead of a purely narrative interest in the historical development of the philosophy of education in question, or

instead of exclusive concern with theoretical inquiry of what is suggestive for pedagogy or how education can learn from it, we get something of both.

To this end, we've turned to scientific literature from the field of philosophy of education, as well as from the history of ideas:

Bauer, H., and Brighi, E. (Eds.) (2009). *Pragmatism in International Relations*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bawden, H. H. (2001). *Early defenders of pragmatism. 1, The principles of pragmatism: A philosophical interpretation of experience*. Bristol: Thoemmes,.

Bernstein, R. J. (1992). The Resurgence of Pragmatism, *Social Research*, 59: 4, pp. 813-840.

Burkhardt, F.H., Bowers, F., and Skrupskelis, I.K. (Eds.) (1975-1988). *The works of William James*. 17 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dumais, F. (2009) *L'appropriation d'un objet culturel: une réactualisation des théories de C.S. Peirce à propos de l'interprétation*. Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Hollinger D. A., and Capper C. (Eds.) (1993). *The American intellectual tradition: A sourcebook*, 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press.

Haak, S. (Ed.) (2006). *Pragmatism, old and new. Selected writings*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Jenkins, P. (2005). *Breve historia de Estados Unidos* (2^a ed.). Madrid: Alianza.

Kuklick, B. (1977). *The rise of American Philosophy. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Malachowski, A. (2004). *Pragmatism. vol.1, The historical development of pragmatism*. London [etc]: SAGE publications.

Margolis, J. (2010). *Pragmatism's advantage: American and European philosophy at the end of the twentieth century*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press.

Menand, L. (2002). *The Metaphysical Club: A story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Privitello, L. A. (2005). Introducing the philosophy of education and pedagogy of Chauncey Wright. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 41(3), 627-649.

Sharpe, A., Dewey, J., and Boydston, J. A. (Eds.) (1967-1987). *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882-1953*, 37 vols. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Stuhr, J. J. (2009) *American Pragmatism: An Introduction*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Tröhler, D., and Oelkers, J. (Eds.) (2005). *Pragmatism and Education*. Róterdam: Sense Publishers.

Valdman, E. (2009) *Idéalisme français, pragmatisme américain: une nécessaire union*. Paris: Harmattan.

Weiss, P. and Burks, A. W. (Eds.) (1931-1958). *Peirce, Charles S. Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Frame

Pragmatism was the most influential philosophy in America during the first quarter of the twentieth Century. Viewed against other idealisms and intellectual currents that have characterized American life, it stands out as a movement that not only had an impact upon academic philosophy but profoundly influenced students of the law, political theory, religion, and, of course, education.

From an epistemological point of view, pragmatism meant rebellion against the vices of speculative reason, seeing in philosophy a critical tool for clarification of thought: the clarification of concepts as a means of enhancing the action. In fact, despite individual differences, all pragmatists rebelled in some way against a particular type of philosophy: idealism. And, generally, they reacted against any expression of a too speculative thought (this way of philosophise dominated much of American thought during the century XIX). Thinking about education in this way had practical consequences.

To put this in a general characterization of pragmatism, we can indicate its opposition to the absolute separation between thought and action, pure and applied science, intuition or revelation, and experience or experimental verification, private and public interests. Pragmatists advanced a theory of inquiry and judgment, for which the logical characteristics and operations that issue in knowledge and in moral valuation and decision are integrally related. Then, knowing and valuing are forms of action in environments consisting of centres of resistance, conflict and conditions of manipulation; environments requiring continual examination and adaptation of human action. Think the reality in this way, and education within that reality, poses clear changes.

Research findings

The intellectual origins of pragmatism are a part of the history of modern philosophy. This paper will show how certain recurring problems and themes from fields like physics, mathematics, or biology, have profoundly affected the emergence of ideas among other fields.

This is what has happened to pragmatism, and, in this sense, pragmatism is a good example of a relevant philosophical current with consequences for the whole intellectual life. Consequences in how we think and what we think it's good for a living. And among life matters, what ends and what means are the best ones to education.

This paper for being presented in BERA's Early Career Researcher Conference, aims to clarify some educational ideas which result from classical works and studies of American pragmatism.