Two Paradigms of Philosophy of Education – A Comparative Analysis

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TWO PARADIGMS OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The present article deals with a comparative analysis between two paradigms advanced by the contemporary philosophy of education – one represented by the version of John Dewey’s and the other one inspired by work of the prominent Georgian philosopher and psychologist Dimitri Uznadze, based on a so called “set development” theory. The article discusses the reasons why an innovative idea, declared by Dewey, that school must provide equal opportunities to every student, projected and suggested by his followers, has not overstepped boundaries of traditional paradigm of education. On the other hand, Uznadze’s version, suggesting a new epistemological paradigm of education, seems closer to solving the problem of reconstruction of traditional philosophy of education. Nevertheless, the problem is again still relevant and needs to be developed in future.

Keywords: pragmatism, experience, set development, philosophy of education.

I. Introduction

A new epistemological paradigm of education was born within the circle of American pragmatism. Research of educational philosophy in modern scientific circles is very actual and essential. The aim of the presented article is to consider the discourse of epistemological theory of education and by comparative to prove its structural resemblance with another educational – psychological experimental doctrine. It is worthwhile to pursue John Dewey’s and psychologist Dimitri Uznadze’s conceptual importance of

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fundamental problems of education and pedagogical sciences. The latter is the author of an original theory called the “Theory of Set”, among which his main working-hypothesis evolve in a great similarity with Dewey’s educational theory. The experimental “Theory of Set” has given us its own way for solving the basic challenges. This experimental theory opened a new path in analyzing the challenges that occur in the process of democratizing the system and the practices of education nowadays.

II. Dewey’s Vision of Plato’s Educational Theory

As it is already known, John Dewey separates three models of education. First of all he makes the analysis of Plato’s model. He argues:

The first one to be considered is that of Plato. No one could better express than he did the fact, that society is stable organized when each individual is doing that for which he has aptitude by nature is such a way as to be useful to others (or to contribute to the whole to which he belongs); and that it is the business of education to discover these aptitudes and progressively to train them for social use. Much which has been said so far is borrowed from what Plato first consciously taught the world. But conditions which he couldn’t intellectually control led him to restrict these ideas in their application. (Dewey 1916, 88)

Indeed, for Dewey, the organization of society was entirely based on the knowledge of the final aim. As a consequence, without knowing the end of a goal taken by an individual we would not know how to build up a perfect organization. There would not be relevant conceptions on how to restrain, or how to rightly and correctly distribute different activities. But how can we obtain any knowledge about the final, definitive and eternal kindness or goodness? Dewey offers an answer for this concern as it follows:

In dealing this question we come upon the seemingly insuperable obstacle that such knowledge is not possible save in a just and harmonious social order. Everywhere else the mind is distracted and misled by false valuations and false perspectives. Disorganized and factional society sets up a number of different models and standards. Under such conditions it is impossible for the individual to attain consistency of mind only a complete whole is fully self-consistent. (Dewey 1916, 89)
An alternative argument is provided by Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, criticizing Plato’s perspectives on the same matter. As Plato suggested, only a small number of individuals, as chosen ones, and only through their love for wisdom, are able to perceive right forms of true being. Dewey considers:

While he affirmed with the emphasis that the place of the individual in the society shouldn’t be determined by birth or wealth or any conventional status, but by his own nature as discovered in the process of education, he had to know perception of the uniqueness of individuals. (Dewey 1916, 90)

Indeed Plato’s educational philosophy was under the influence of static ideas of traditional antic vision; he could not approve innovative changes because he thought the changes and alteration could bring new deep complexities.

**III. The Philosophy of Education During the Enlightenment**

The 18th century’s philosophical framework gives us rather different ideas on model of education. This modern period conserves its affinities for Plato’s educational theory, but it is absolutely clear that the new perspectives on the idea of freedom and the autonomy of the individuals’ discourses appear in a different formula. In fact, it is the period when antisocial philosophy was ostentatiously directed towards the free society, enforcing – cosmopolitism. Its humanism rose as a positive idea. This doctrine of absolute disenthrall is an idea that depicts the improvement of human. John Dewey argues:

It was plainly seen that economic and political limitations were ultimately dependent upon imitations of thought and feeling. The first step in freeing man from external chains was to emancipate them from internal chains of false beliefs and ideals. Social institutions were too false and corrupt to be trusted with this work. (92)

Dewey honors Jean-Jacques Rousseau for arguments on prioritizing the voice of nature, which lies at the core of a new diversity of individual talents, rising personality. As Rousseau argues:
From the first moment of life, men ought to begin learning to deserve to live; and, as at the instant of birth we partake of the rights of citizenship, that instant ought to be the beginning of the exercise of our duty. If there are laws for the age of maturity, there ought to be laws for infancy, teaching obedience to others: and as the reason of each man is not left to be the sole arbiter of his duties, government ought the less indiscriminately to abandon to the intelligence and prejudices of fathers the education of their children, as that education is of still greater importance to the State than to the fathers: for, according to the course of nature, the death of the father often deprives him of the final fruits of education; but his country sooner or later perceives its effects. Families dissolve but the State remains.²

As we see the empirical doctrine of philosophy was innovative in theory of knowledge and this kind of education was doubtless progressive and relevant for developing educational skills.

IV. Dewey’s Theory of Education Based on Experience

For many years, the pragmatic outlook was not recognized as an independent, original view within philosophy. European thinkers perceived just it as a continuation, or a renewal of traditional empiricism, as the heritage left by the thinking of the British philosophers: David Hume and John Lock. It was in the middle of the 20th century when it became recognized as an independent philosophical vision. But prominent American philosophers such as: John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and Josiah Royce as well provided a quite new philosophical discourse on experience, freedom, education democracy and understanding of “self”. As an example, Dewey demanded the reconstruction in philosophy:

It has been stated that philosophy grows out of, and in intention is connected with, human affairs. There is implicit in this view the further view that, while acknowledgment of this fact is a precondition of the reconstruction now required, yet it means more than that philosophy ought in the future to be connected with the crises and tensions in the conduct of human affairs. (Dewey 1948, 11)

As John Smith argues, an “inferential stretch” is found in experience. The importance of the theme of experience in European academic society has been acknowledged by the prominent German thinker Edmund Husserl, whose phenomenological method is so akin to new understanding of experience by pragmatism. An alternative name for the intentional method of the Husserlian philosophy is that of “philosophy of experience”. “Back to things”, “back to the real occasions of life” – that is what the method of the phenomenological system recommends, for perceiving the human being. This opinion is very relative to the pragmatic outlook, arguing that abstract, formal skills are not relevant and useful in real occasions of life.

American transcendentalism does not recognize any sort of values, it disconsiders their significance and application. John Dewey emphasizes the several types of experience. For example: direct and indirect experiences. Both of them are very important instruments for observation in perceiving for self-identification and acknowledge inner world, as well.

The first and most important institution of community, which is not being trivial for Dewey, is the school. School is a place, where a child has the chance to find his one “self”. All his direct or indirect experiences must be observed and taken to the point. Each pupil must feel, that he or she is irreplaceable, being one “self”, an individual person. Every past experience prepares the space for a new one. This approach is relevant in opening new epistemological paradigm of education. All sources of formal skills must be mobilized around the student, as a pupil and the teacher, or the tutor, organizing or influencing the free development each of them.

All individual talents and opportunities must be developed and fostered, as individual and unique. Only a free and a successful person can create a real democratic society, since it is the only kind of person that might be able, due to his or her education, to develop real democratic values.

The development of reflective thinking is the most important aim of education as Dewey argues. The role played by this setup is essential in the creative process of a free society from its very beginning, Dewey explains:
The problem of securing diffused and seminal intelligence can be solved only in
the degree in which local communal life becomes a reality. (Dewey 1927, 217-18)

Dewey thought that school was one of the few remaining institutions,
which could provide children with a richer sense of dialogue, interaction,
integration and community. Even church has endured the deep impact
of industrial specialization and urbanization, and therefore school as a
community became more important than it has ever been before.

Time and again, Dewey argued, that “the roots of vital democracy
are found in just those “face to face” associations which the complexity
and impersonality of modern technological society, that makes it
increasingly difficult to sustain. The school, he believed, showed at the
outset of life be a living example of the sort of community that an ideal
democracy would be.” (Smith 1992, 141)

V. The “Theory of Set” in Psychology

In this section I will analyze the “Theory of Set”. The author of this
conception, as we stated above, is a prominent Georgian philosopher
and psychologist Dimitri Uznadze. In 1905 he left Georgia and entered
Leipzig University becoming the student of Wilhelm Wundt. He
devoted his study to philosophy and metaphysics. After a successful
graduation, in 1910, he received his PhD degree at the University of
Wittenberg (Halle, Germany) for his work “Vladimer Soloviov: Epistemology
and Metaphysics”. Soon, he entered Kharkov University and graduated
it in 1913. Returning home he taught history at Kutaisi Georgian
Gymnasium until 1917 and gathered a wide experience teaching at
school, being the headmaster of a specialized school for girls “Sinatle”.

People see deliverance in education and they pounce on it, but the deliverance is steel
invisible. And our society thinks: our schools absolutely do not pay attention to living
conditions, they aren’t able to bring up people who are ready for living and it’s no
wonder that turnaround from stagnation is steel impossible. (Uznadze 1915, 151)

A “set” according to Uznadze, is a fundamental structure of a
person. The set is a pre-readiness for behavior. As it is grown up before
the behavior. Each behavior must be recognized as part of the realization of this set. The evolution of the set is determined by the meeting of necessity and situation. According to Uznadze, the human activity consists of three components: situation – set – behavior. After the actualization of a behavior the set never disappears. It is remarked by continuity and through experience is becomes shaped as a new set, fulfilled by a new experience. This doctrine became very important for the philosophy of education, reorganizing the educational system and the pedagogical sciences. However, Uznadze made up his “set” as a system belonging to a psychological theory.

Afterwards, he began a widely experimental research on the origins and regulations of the “Theory of Set”. Uznadze discovered that the set is a middle structure between environment and behavior. He coined the perceptive process that Piaget recognized as “Uznadze’s Effect”. It is based on the unconscious psychological condition, on one hand similar to the Freudian “Unconscious Mind”, but on the other hand correspondent to the theory of unconsciousness. Uznadze criticized the Freudian psychoanalytic theory of personality, his understanding of the unconscious, but he recognized the undoubting success of the therapeutic psychoanalysis. Uznadze argued that the neurosis is the result of unrealized sets and not unrealized aspirations. The “Theory of Set” is the part of experimental psychology and also the way of development. It is an explaining idea of one person’s development: human speeches, memories, thinking and etc. According to this theory, the practice of education and upbringing must be based on set. After returning from Germany as we already mentioned he had teaching practice and he published scientific works in education and pedagogy (“Introduction in Experimental Pedagogics”). In this work, he mentions that teachers and students are motivated by social sets. These demands are not correspondent to the teacher’s sets. It is “a tragic moment” in the pedagogical practice. So it is unavoidable to make curriculum and the whole teaching program come in harmony both with the teacher’s objective demands and the student’s estimations as well. The teacher must know and acknowledge each student’s original and individual specifics and must turn the child’s sets to more emphatic emotions. In the theory of Uznadze the pupil’s activities and the
relationships between them are emphasized and brought in dialogue. Consequently, this method categorically refuses to give marks at the level of elementary school.

VI. The Upbringing of Will

Uznadze considers will as a sort of activity that lays on the roots of the psychological creativity as a creative stream. He considers the psychology of will as the analysis of the psycho-intellectual consequences of a person. Each person’s will and the activities derived from it establish in a creative way of life.

Real point of life, its matrix is shown in a cultural creativity, and the main principle of creativity is will, so preparing student for life lays in the development of his/her will. To grow up will mean to make changes in empirical reality, that means to do something yourself, make any kind of business. (Uznadze 1915, 153)

The homework assignment, a problem which students gets to work out at home, has to be composed by segments, that show the idea of wholeness and aims, this approach clearly shows the reconstructive vision of new educational discourse, demands and challenges. This formula stands near to Kurt Lewin’s “Aufforderungscharakter” (demand characteristics), Nicolas Achlin’s “Theory of Knowledge”, as the Gestalt psychology’s “ending rule” and Dimitri Uznadze’s “Theory of Set”, which also appears from equivalence of external and internal synthesis.

VII. Discipline and Self-Government

According to Uznadze, school must be competent in upbringing any kind of behavior.

So discipline could have maximum of upbringing, when pupils/students are considering themselves about their conduct. And consequently build up their own rules of ethics by making their cognitive decisions turn into their everyday life (154).
Nowadays discipline is most problematic point of education and learning. Each teacher who has any kind of experience in teaching is aware of this problem. Uznadze’s approach is too idealistic to be realized. In any case, the educational system and teaching requires certain rules. School is a small society, which leads hard common rules of life and as usually, the members of this society do not take part in regulation and settlement of real life. Students do not have opportunities to realize their new-found feelings, emotions and moral principles and put them in experience-empirical life occasions.

VIII. Upbringing of Feeling and Transforming Ideas into Power

The act of feeling is an irreplaceable companion of every human conduct. It has almighty influence on the human’s will; it can even change willpower and bring it under the social aims. It is the act of feeling that can build up new moral fundaments, without the moral power of the will; upbringing, a person, loses the importance of the social meaning. School that fights for transforming idea into the power must be inevitable of the highest level. Only rhetoric, studying and reading books is not enough to make up moral ideals. What is learned and read must be reached not only brains of the students, but their hearts and souls and this is reachable by training. This is the way to create moral ideals and make them powerful. Knowledge is the power which leads the process of world’s transformation.

IX. Conclusions

Works and ideas of John Dewey and Dimitri Uznadze in philosophy and psychology of education are strictly focused on the democratization and individualization, of solving problems of incomplete system of education. Their rich theoretical and practical experiences still need future elaboration and treatment, as contemporary sets forth new challenges, new dilemmas and innovations. The pragmatic view of philosophy
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collaborates with all kinds of cognitive theories. All ideas are relevant and near the truth, if they are useful for progress. Despite the fact that the “Theory of Set” advanced by Dimitri Uznadze and the paradigm of philosophy of education conceived by John Dewey are relevant and up to date, they still need subsequent researches and development.

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