

Final Examine Ed. 770:
Big Ideas of Dewey, Bruner and Vygotsky

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Fall, 1009

BIG IDEA #1- JOHN DEWEY

Experience is educative, but not all experiences are equally useful.

Citation

The belief that all genuine experience comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For example, some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the affect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. (Dewey, 1938, p. 25).

Explanation

Dewey believes that there are three crucial components for learning:

- 1) There is a continuum in learning, meaning that learning and growth go beyond the actual immediate experience: “the principal of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those who come after.” (Dewey, 1938, p 35) and “...there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes, which help decide the quality of further expression” (Dewey, 1938, p. 37)
- 2) For learning to happen, there need to be an intentional purpose- learning does not happen in a vacuum: “the immediate and direct concern of the educator is then with the situations in which interaction takes place”

(Dewey, 1938, p. 45) and "...it includes what is done by the educator and the way in which it was done, not only in words spoken but the tone of voice in which they were spoken. It includes equipment, books, apparatus, toys, games played. It includes the materials with which an individual interacts, and, most important of all, the social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged." (Dewey, 1938, p. 45)

- 3) Learning is transactional- it takes place between a person and situation: "...individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations." (Dewey, 1938, p. 43), "...that interaction is going on between an individual and objects and other persons. The conceptions of situation and of interaction are inseparable from each other." (Dewey, 1938, p. 43)

This means that meaningful learning is not incidental or temporary, and does not happen in a solitary environment void of people, objects or people. Meaningful learning happens when there is intent (learner and teacher) and relationships (between people, things and places. But, Dewey is also saying that not all experiences or situations are equal- sometimes a person's experience includes one of learning, sometimes, just experiential memory. One can have an experience that is not a learning experience because does not

Example

As a child, I would sit in math classes wondering if the professor was speaking in a completely foreign language, although once in awhile I did recognize certain terms, such as "addition" or "subtraction". I was even more lost once we entered the realm of the

“-ometry” disciplines, such as geometry, trigonometry, etc. The teachers would assign us tasks that were designed to teach us, but not being a math-learner, I would be lost and desensitized to what I eventually discovered to be a rich and interesting world (although I still do not understand much, I can appreciate the beauty and creativity of many classic theorems). Years later, while serving in the military, I discovered that I do have an aptitude for higher math- when it is applied. Learning and later teaching weapons systems that required an understanding of ballistics, trajectory, angles other constructs, I became aware of my own strengths and weaknesses of learning math. Rather than simply read theory, I needed it to see and act upon in practical exercises. Despite their good intentions, math teachers that I had early on in my formal education career may have attempted to set up learning exercises for me, but ultimately failed because of their inability (and probably lack of time and awareness) at the time to identify my style of learning math. I became desensitized to the primary theories and need for math and gained a misconception of myself as a math learner. I consider myself lucky that my personality is such that despite all poor marks throughout school in math and a certain amount of maturity, I was eventually able to become aware of the beauty of math as well as its uses and practical applications in what I do.

BIG IDEA #2- JOHN BRUNER

Culture embodies meaning and that meaning is contained in narrative.

Citation

“...it is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and the human mind, that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems—its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life.” (Bruner, 1990, p. 34)

Explanation

“It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture’s symbolic systems— its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent life.” (Bruner, 1990, p. 34) and “Michelle Rosaldo argues that the notions of “self” or “affect” “grow not from ‘inner’ essence relatively independent of the social world, but from the experience in a world of meanings, images, and social bonds, in which all persons are inevitable involved.” (Bruner, 1990, p. 42).

“The act of grasping a narrative, then, is a dual one: the interpreter has to grasp the narrative’s configuring plot in order to make sense of its constituents, which he must relate to the plot. But the plot configuration must itself be extracted from the success of events.” (Bruner, 1990, pp. 43-44) and “In other words, the sequence of its sentences, rather than the truth or falsity of any of those sentences is what determines the overall configuration or plot.” (Bruner, 1990, p. 44)

At its most elemental level, this all means that the community, geographical location and other external factors heavily contextualize learning. If we think of the multiplicity of

definitions of words we see that words have different meanings based on the location and experiences of specific communities.

Example

The Inuit peoples who inhabit the arctic regions of the planet have many different ways of saying and describing “snow”. Many of the words uses are based upon the same root so that they cannot be accurately described as being unique words, yet the context, application and uses of these different words not only describe the environment, they provide context and meaning for what and how the Inuit live their lives. A wet snowfall may require a different set of clothing than a dry one. Crusty ice is different than smooth ice, which requires different methods of transportation. The cultural context and meaning of these words are meaningless to people who live in warmer regions, such as the beach towns of southern California (the last recorded and measureable snowfall in downtown Los Angeles happened on January 22, 1962). On the other hand, the warm, beach towns of California have helped establish a community of surfers who have adapted and created a completely different dialect for describing waves. Wikipedia provides a glossary of surfing terms of over 75 words in English as an appendix to its’ entry on Surfing. We see that the two cultures (Inuit and surfers) have developed two lexicons for same basic compound- H₂O and that the meanings are completely based upon the needs and requirements of the social society and culture.

BIG IDEA #3- LEV S. VYGOTSKY

The process of mediated memory and learning start externally, (tools, signs or language)

and with practical application it becomes internalized as mastery occurs.

Citation

"...the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavior transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development... the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 7)

Explanation

Tools are external and do not change. What does change are the signs (the internal meanings) that we as a culture assigned to the tool. Hence the same tool may be understood and acted upon differently with an individual's maturation, development and education.

Example

One of the tenets of Traditional Judaism is that belief (words) usually follows action (the external tool). For example, at their first day of school, it is traditional to give a child a something sweet that is shaped as a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so that the child will equate learning with sweetness. The confection then acts as a tool that the child will internalize to help them to learn and develop as they mature. Another example within the Jewish tradition is the dietary laws. A child first learns about what can and cannot be eaten before learning the reason. As they mature and learn, the act of following these laws begin to acquire meanings as well as define the individual as part of a larger

community. It is also customary to revisit the meanings of the traditions and laws so that as a person grows, they obtain additional meanings that keep the tradition meaningful. I would argue that there are similar traditions in other religions, cultures and disciplines. For example, a child learns to use a pencil to learn and write the alphabet. But, passage of time and experience promotes deeper and richer meanings as individuals learn to assemble the letters into words and the words into sentences and narratives. Clearly the work of a mature author is very different from their work as a youth even though they may be using the same external tool (a pencil).

Resources

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