

PRAGMATISM

MEANING AND DEFINITION

The term pragmatism is derived from the Greek word pragma which means action, from which words like practice and practical have been derived. It can be easily understood through this that pragmatism is basically the greater impact of practical due to which pragmatism is often translated as practicalism (Agarwal, Bansal & Maheshwari, 2010).

Charles Pierce introduced this word in philosophy, in 1878 when he wrote an essay in the “Popular Science Monthly” on “How to make our ideas clear” in which he gave the idea of pragmatism when he said that any idea can only be understood if it is examined in terms of consequences to which it leads to. Pragmatism gives emphasis upon what is practical, efficient, fruitful and satisfying. It does not think of the world as readymade, perfect, beautiful, something to be enjoyed, contemplated or worshipped (Agarwal et al, 2010).

MAIN PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS OF PRAGMATISM

The main philosophical ideas that pragmatism represents (Singh, 2007) include:

According to pragmatists, there are as many worlds as human beings. The ultimate reality is not one but many. Everyone searches truth and aims according to his will and experiences or circumstances can change the truth.

The world is a process, a constant flux. Truth is always in the making. The world is ever progressing and evolving and everything in the world keeps on changing.

Pragmatists are utilitarianists, utility is the test of all truth and reality. A useful principle is that which is true. The result or consequence of an action decides that worth of something as good or bad. Good results show the truth and validity of any principle or idea whereas bad results conclude to bad principles. Circumstances determine the beliefs and theories to be good or evil.

The world serves as a laboratory for the development of aims and values. Changing aims and values are with time and clime and thus aims cannot be accepted as they are. Everyone should seek aims and values according to ones tendencies and abilities.

Pragmatists are individualists. Maximum premium upon human freedom in life is provided which goes with equality and fraternity. Everyone has the right to adjust to ones environment with ease and in conformity with ones rights and individuality.

Since man is a social animal, one needs social circumstances to develop and acquire success in the society. Man's aims and values make him successful in developing his personal as well as social personality.

Pragmatists give more importance to actions than ideas. Activity is the means to attain the end of knowledge. Therefore, one should learn by experimentation which is required in every field of life. As John Dewey says, "When we experience something, we act upon it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and the thing does something in return." (Agarwal et al, 2010)

To pragmatists, intelligence itself is nothing abstract, it is merely a quality of thinking whose purpose is to efficiently solve problems of living. It is to use the method of reflective thinking in our daily life.

PRAGMATISM AND EDUCATION

The man who introduced Pragmatism in Education is John Dewey. According to him, the real value of a thing lies in its utility for human development and welfare. Thus even education is useless if it does not promote human welfare and so the system of education should be changed so that it becomes both desirable and beneficial. Education should provide real life experiences to the learners so as to make them dynamic, resourceful efficient and enterprising. John Dewey characterizes education mainly as growth, as life, as continuous reconstruction of experiences, as a social process (Singh, 2007). His philosophical implications made pragmatism also be known as instrumentalism or experimentalism (Agarwal et al, 2010). Some of the educational ideas presented by John Dewey in his most famous writing in 1916, Democracy and Education are:

PRAGMATIC AIMS OF EDUCATION

Pragmatists believe that the aims are always determined by individual not by any organization or any structure. Perhaps the best statement of what might be called the pragmatists educational aims can be found in the writing of John Dewey. The aim for education is to teach children to be

comfortable in their learning environment to an extent that children are living their life. Dewey believed in this type of environment that is not considered a preparation for life, but life itself. He believed that educators should know the ideas and materials that motivate and interest children and plan accordingly. Dewey believed that aims should grow out of existing conditions, be tentative, and have an end view. In *Democracy and education*, he wrote that education is “that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Agarwal et al, 2010). The aim that might be derived from the foregoing definition of education would include the helping of the child to develop in such a way as to contribute to his continued growth (Agarwal et al, 2010).

Some of the aims of education outlined by John Dewey (as cited in Khalid, 2005) are:

Education must develop the power of effective experiencing. The pupil must be enabled to cope with the indeterminacies of life.

Even the specific objectives should be focused, clear, concrete, practicable and oriented towards human welfare. Natural development should be taken to notice. This refers to the development of bodily organs and the maintenance of health and vigor. It also includes the development of physical skills that would be useful in games and play and other such activities. Individual differences should also be entertained during this training.

Social efficiency is another aim of education. Its function is to habituate an individual to social control, to develop a willingness to subordinate his natural urges to social desires.

PRAGMATISM AND CURRICULUM

The universe is the subject matter for the pragmatist. Any educative experience is the subject matter of the curriculum, any experience contributing to growth. The subject matter exists ready to be explored, but the real concern must always be for the interaction of the pupil with the subject matter of his current needs, capacities, and concerns (Agarwal et al, 2010). Curriculum should bring the disciplines together to focus on solving problems in an interdisciplinary way. Rather than passing down organized bodies of knowledge to new learners, Pragmatists believe that learners should apply their knowledge to real situations through experimental inquiry. This prepares students for citizenship, daily living, and future careers (Agarwal et al, 2010). A study of social, economic and political problems, natural

resources and their maintenance and other such studies should form the curriculum.

Subjects include Mathematics, History, Geography, Hygiene, Physical Learning and more.

Thus all the content that prepares the child for individual as well as social adjustment can be included in the curriculum (Singh, 2007).

PRAGMATISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

Instead of the book, the teacher, the subject matter or the child in nature (as in naturalism), pragmatists emphasize on the child's upbringing in a social world. As, learning always occurs as a result of movement and activity, the teacher has to capitalize upon the activities of children to direct their teaching-learning processes (Dash, 2004).

The classroom would be a functional atmosphere with the interest of the children at hand. Problem solving, themes, experiments are all parts of the pragmatic philosophy. The curriculum for the pragmatic philosophy supports a connection between knowledge and experience. It is important for children to connect the two so learning can become meaningful. According to Dewey, children must be interested in the subject matter to gain meaning. Subjects that are difficult and cause children to struggle should be organized and designed to build motivation about the topics. Children should enjoy learning and leave with a sense of accomplishment (Agarwal et al, 2010).

John Dewey feels that method of teaching should develop reflective thinking among students. "Why" should be asked and not "How". The method and matter of study go side by side. Specifically, Project method in classroom facilitates learning and experimentation. Discussion method is also considered healthy and fruitful (Dash, 2004).

PRAGMATISM AND THE SCHOOL

The school serves as both, part of an environment as well as a man made environment which works to provide the best possible learning experiences to the students and that is why John Dewey calls a school as "Miniature society" and asserts that "schools should be the true representatives of the society" (Singh, 200, p.187) where students experience all the activities in accordance with their interests, aptitudes and capacities (Singh, 2007).

In an industrial society like ours, the school should be a miniature workshop and a miniature community; that is it should teach through practice, and through trial and error, the arts and

discipline necessary for economic or social order. In fact, any social environment which inspires the children for experimentation constitutes as a school for them (Agarwal et al, 2010).

PRAGMATISM AND DISCIPLINE

Pragmatism favors freedom for children. The teacher, acting as an advisor and guide, and the self active learning of the students should together promote discipline. John Dewey believes that both interests and discipline are closely related to each other and so the interest of students if aroused, sustained and satisfied would itself result in discipline. Pragmatism advocates the merging of play with work. By doing so, an eagerness, willingness and joy develops among students in relation to their work without thinking of what others are doing. Students develop an attitude of seriousness, consideration and sincerity as well as self confidence, self reliance, sympathy and fellow feeling. The formation of these social attributes result in social discipline and moral obligation (Singh, 2007).

PRAGMATISM AND THE STUDENT

The pragmatists see a student as a whole organism which consists of the biological self, the psychological self and the social self. A student is constantly interacting with the environment and brings to school all the values, meanings and experiences as a learner (Agarwal et al, 2010).

A student is creative and constructive by nature. They are not just passive listeners but an active participant in the tri polar process of education (that is the student, the educator and the teaching learning process). Therefore their intrinsic needs of creativity and activity should be fulfilled by educators through challenging environment in the classroom (Dash, 2004).

PRAGMATISM AND THE TEACHER

The teacher, as pragmatists view it, is not a dictator but only a leader of group activities. He should not overshadow the personality of the students. The teacher has to plan and organize the teaching-learning process, provide learning opportunities for experimentation. Teachers must not impose themselves onto the learners and should help them build socially and intellectually with equal opportunities (Singh, 2007). The role of the teacher is important in successfully educating students. The teacher must capture the student's interest and build on the natural motivation that exists (Khalid, 2005). Teachers need to remember to vary their teaching methods to accommodate each

individual learning style. Not all children learn at the same pace or are at the same point; therefore, the teacher must vary his/her style. Dewey believed that knowledge should be organized and related to current experiences. The teacher, for the pragmatist, is a member of the learning group who serves in the capacity of helper, guide, and arranger of experiences who is as involved in the educative process as are the students within the system (Agarwal et al, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Pragmatism as an educational belief does not have everyone agreeing. Some believe that it is too vague and others believe it is too watered down. After analyzing pragmatism, one may feel that this philosophy best describes one's teaching style. This philosophy is easier to understand and make connections. Pragmatism reminds teachers to individualize their instruction to meet the needs of each learner. One must remember to keep old traditions, but incorporate new ideas.

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