Knowledge and Learning Con-Validation Processes

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Abstract
Educational research on learning models highlights the need to activate awareness in the individual to assess knowledge and its function. This presupposes that the very knowledge does not have the character of a passive reflection of an already existing order of things. Rather, it is a question of recognizing in the individual the dynamic identity between learning and acting. In this context of investigation, it may be useful to revisit some fundamental lines of thinking expressed by classical American pragmatism, according to which human being is essentially action. Hence, everyone at the same time, is responsible to contributing to the production of a situational truth and to its con-validating. In this sense, the function of knowing as learning cannot be separated from its connection with a social praxis.
Key words: Knowledge; Learning; Pragmatism; Truth; Feedback

1. Contextual Knowledge/Contextual Investigation

Every cultural reflection today moves in the space of a true antinomy between practical reason and theoretical reason, due to the feature to aggregate positions that are even ideologically distant from each other, due to the plural axiological connotation which, within a globalized and multi-ethnic, gathers diversified proposals of social participation[1]. It follows desirability of cognitive openness, not just as an individual propensity or quality of character, but as a cultural keystone. Reality – once defined as ontologically founded – reaches its highest expression of openness within epistemological scenarios no more centered on totalizing notions of truth. The assertion that there is no absolute point of view to look at phenomena, is not an implicit admission of ethical

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[1] Cfr. Crowder, G. (2019).

relativism, but an admission of onto-ethic relativity, as well as of intellectual honesty, since knowledge always presupposes a somatic-chronologic-topologic situation. As Hans-Georg Gadamer observes no one is without prejudice, since we all require some kind of prejudices to represent the horizon of our views [2]. Hence, takes on significant social value the ability to critically process knowledge, a disposition that should be prefigured as fundamental in any educational experience. Philosophy of education along with other sciences of education, are not merely teaching matters, since they empower individuals in self-evaluation by promoting and supporting human awareness. Individuals solicited to a constant mind openness may rely on learning and reflectiveness as tools to pursue sustainable solutions to improve life quality, as well to reconfigure social values.[3]

The historical transition/transformation to which human beings bear witness calls for new cultural mindsets that operate across interaction and networking. The notion of complexity, exploded in the mid-eighties, is the new cultural paradigm, as a transversal model in and between knowledge, as an innovative epistemological frontier, under the impulse both of a revision of the logic of science (more problematic and sophisticated and interactive) and of a transformation of society (complicated by techniques, re-articulated in groups and classes, variegated in objectives, and then plural, flexible, open, interconnected).

What, then, should be the outcome of the critical skills attained during the school curricula? To what extent and how does the learning experience enable everyone to master connections within knowledge?

Recent methodological-pedagogic research focuses on how the acquisition of critical (and creative) thinking, is linked to the awareness of knowledge assimilation as well as operation: that is a mental habit that enables individual to appreciate and evaluate her/his learning in view of its social effectiveness. Fundamental, in this process of activating knowledge, is the time of feedback as an experience of interaction that allows to bridge formal and non-formal skills, as well as to target one's professional role within the historical context. Contemporary educational approaches, aiming at self-empowerment point toward conceiving feedback as a transition opportunity to consent on new learning arrangements and, therefore, generating common criteria of legitimacy to expand any argument. The effectiveness of feedback, as a cognitive and practical resource, is to generates an intersubjective value-horizon among interlocutors promoting self-evaluation, in which each participant questions her/his levels of expertise by ensuring dynamics of cooperation and trust.

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[2] Cfr. Gadamer H.G. (1975)
[3] Cfr. Perkins Driscoll M. (2005).

Individuals train themselves to validate cultural frameworks. In this way the prospect of basic self-confidence is inherent in knowledge not only as representation or construction, but as enaction of meanings from experiences in the world and about the world. As a consequence, cognitive process depends both on neural activity and sensory-emotional dynamics involving every human being and the environment in which s/he is situated.

1.1 Assessing the Different Interpretations

Posing the task in this way within educational research, it may be useful to refer to and reflect upon the fundamental lines of a philosophical school of thought, such as American pragmatism, according to which any cognitive outcome is a concrete action. Pragmatist thinking affirms that any individual's act of learning is not a passive mirroring of an already existing order of things: rather, it is a dynamic action of corroboration of truth. For, as it turns out, everyone at the same time, is responsible to contributing to the production of a situational truth and to its con-validating. Hence, the function of knowing as learning cannot be separated from its connection with a social praxis.

Recent research works on embodied cognition and philosophy of psychopathology, point out that pragmatist thinking is a precursor of contemporary extended enactive approaches to cognition[4]. Pragmatism highlights how conscious experiences are constitutively connected to sensory-motor interactions between the subject and the external environment. Ideas are tools, or drives, to take actions in given reality. Pragmatism is a method, but also a theory of ideas, or rather a genetic theory of truth. Mainly as a research approach requires to test the truth or falsehood of ideas by paying attention to their practical results, that is, to what matters in terms of expectations and advancement in human contexts.

The notion of a not metaphysical truth which is transformed into a search, activates a process of skillful manipulation of knowledge in which the prediction of goals and outcomes relies on constant feedbacks, both conjunctive and disjunctive. The verification of ideas places the individual in a horizon where s/he is willing to consider alternatives, cognitive or practical, where s/he can cherish reversibility of decisions, structures, patterns.

In fact, the recognition of the polyphonic character of truth is only the other side of the pluralistic constitution of reality, recognizable on the other hand also

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[4] Enactive approaches in cognitive science propose that perception, and more generally cognitive experience, are strongly mediated by embodied (sensory-motor) processes, and that our primary experience of the world is action-oriented or pragmatic. Cfr. Gallagher S. (2014), Pragmatic interventions into enactive and extended conceptions of cognition. In *Philosophical Issues*, 24(1): 110-126.

by the fact that every object always appears with a specific fringe of relationships, indeed the word real itself is, in short, a fringe[5]. This concept of fringe, which primarily refers to the unexpressed, but potentially active, of the psychic stream, also characterizes reality itself, which presents itself as an open field of unexpressed relationships and possibilities, from which attention can be captured at any moment. The pragmatist investigation therefore extends into pedagogical analysis, in search of knowledge on the meaning of life, of human action, of his identity and continuity between past and future, of his position within an open and pluralistic universe.

1.2 The Discoursive and Practical Strategy of Pragamtism

Re-approaching classical pragmatism – starting from William James' reflections – leads to focus on how individuals are motivated by a passion for praxis. Any individual truth, achieved through the processes of knowledge activates a continuously ongoing where exists – as James writes – a "conjugal function", between acquired ideas and any new experience which introduces crisis and variations. "The trail of the human serpent is thus over everything". Thus, the truth of an idea/experience is to be grasped, not looking back at eternal principles, nor upwards to absolute models, but looking forward to future ways of stabilization and continuity over time[6].

There are two assumptions not explicitly stated, but easily recognizable behind this pragmatic interpretation of the truth. The first is the recognition of individuals as emotionally ready to accept change since essentially definable by the principle-action, rather than by the principle-logos[7]. The second assumption is linked to the very articulation of the query on truth, which is never that of seeking its essence, the immutable property that inheres it, yet its function, which refers to a genesis and is determined within a process. By acknowledging truth as an additional sense with which an idea (reality, experience, etc.) is charged through a vital interaction, means attributing central

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[5] The meaning of real is grounded in the most encompassing of all fringes, i.e. the sense of the world as a spatial and temporal whole that includes the self as a being among other beings. Cfr. Wilshire B. (1968). *William James and Phenomenology: a Study of "The Principles of Psychology"*. Bloomington-London, pp. 179-180.

[6] The verifiability of an idea becomes the criterion by which its truth can be defined and, therefore, the meaning of an idea is closely connected with its consequences: "true are those ideas that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. The ideas with which it is not possible to do all this are false" James W. (1902).

[7] The anthropologist Gehlen, who identifies pragmatism as the only philosophy, so far, that considers man constitutively as an essence that acts, underlines how "productive" operational knowledge coincides with the confirmation of man's capacity to transcend the given situation. Cfr. Gehlen A. (1988).

meaning to the relational dimension and to the narration that is linked to it. Knowledge's task from the point of view of classical pragmatism – as well as neo-pragmatism – is to explore and preserve, rather than systematize, what is alive: benefiting from contingency, situatedness and historicity, therefore, ensuing as worth what any new achievement might entail.

Individuals see learning and reflectiveness as values to be pursued when confronting plurality: within prominent exchanges, knowledge becomes upbringing, edification. Where communication occurs, there, participants possess the emotional confidence to try out as yet partially explored paths, to venture into the unknown, to accept the unexpected. Knowledge – in Charles Peirce's analyses – does not represent the pure mental content of a subjectivity, rather a psycho-physical feature producing tangible effects not always empirically observable, yet intersubjectively verifiable[8]. Hence, the place of the authentic realization of meaning modifies its actors. The acknowledgment of mutual traces of deep variation occurring on individuals and reality brings to a better designing of educational space and time.

John Dewey points out how living, considered in all its aspects, physical and spiritual ones, depends essentially on the individual's participation in transactions which include biological and cultural dimensions[9]. Living in an environment of shared meanings and values yields that upon stimuli, the subject responds with meaningful mind and body signals. From birth to death, every human being is a part fitting between the parts, so that neither s/he, nor anything experienced, can ever be understood apart from this conscious participation in a vast corpus of transactions.[10]

According to Richard Rorty, each subject is called to enrich a cultural core by offering responsible solutions along with personal contributions generated by one's own imagination. Rorty underlines how the acquisition of skills implies the evaluation of their fruitfulness for organizing exchanges with the

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[8] Cfr. Charles Sanders Peirce. *Pragmatism and Pragamticism*. In Collected Papers, Harvard University Press, 1931/1935, vol.V.

[9] John Dewey highlights how, with regard to knowledge, while the interaction is limited to investigating the relation between knower and known, the transaction observes men in all representative activities, connected with perceiving and manipulating things, allowing a full descriptive and functional treatment of the whole process and all its contents. Cfr. Dewey J., Fisher Bentley A. (1949).

[10] John Dewey notes how the brain is essentially an organ for mutual adaptation between stimuli received from the environment and direct responses to it. This view is fully consistent with contemporary enactivist arguments that cognition is not just a matter of brain processes and that the brain is a part of the body constituted by dynamic regulation. The neo-pragmatist Robert Brandom observes in this regard how the main form of intentionality (in the sense of orientation towards objects) is the practical involvement with the objects exhibited by a sentient creature who skillfully deals with her/his world. Cfr. Brandom R. (2008).

world that favor one's own flourishing[11]. Truth in this case becomes an indispensable mastery to understand one's cultural heritage and participate in a synergic moving towards innovative steps. Rorty recognizes that human growth takes place through an initial process of inculturation (primary and secondary schooling) and a subsequent work in progress in awareness (university). A process of *Bildung* within which, each one can gradually individualize her/himself so to take distance from the culture to which s/he belongs, and, subsequently, fully re-appreciate it as self-education.

The educational process in its complexity reveals a central problem which specifically characterizes the role of a critical pedagogy: the subject-person, in fact, is always to be considered in the specific situation in which s/he expresses her/himself. In this sense it is possible to grasp precisely in the analysis of the person the meaning of a pedagogy as a discipline intentionally capable of analyzing and intervening with the elaboration of critical training models, which derive their justification elements in the identification of principles and criteria, such as those of knowing and interpreting the possibilities of personal and social development of the subjects-persons in the specific situations of their existence (Putnam, 1995).

Pragmatist thought, albeit with different procedures, converges on a broad, articulated, procedural, evolutionary conception of experience that denotes the unity of memory, feelings, habits, reasoning. In this sense, the act of experience/learning is confirmed as a unitary and continuous circuit, in which interruptions take place, i.e. a circuit of balances in which any feedback or evaluation sets the necessary phase to enlarge its scope.

The process of learning is lived primarily as a temporal experience which challenges to de-coincide from the punctuality of the present by opening up areas of meta-empirical knowledge – such as trust, hope – structurally innervated to a movement of co-extension from the past towards the future. This leads to a decisive interrogation for pedagogical planning: the designing of educational tools as adaptive strategies to face the challenges and multifold performance that the environment-world requires.

2. Verification and Corroboration of Knowledge

Understanding of pragmatism from a pedagogical perspective can foster a rethinking of educational paths, as well as verifications of student voice's performance in reference to theory, policies and best practices. In education, the concept of student voice is twofold. It refers to the expression of values,

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[11] Cfr. Rorty, R. (1982).

opinions, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals and groups of students in a school and to instructional, approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions. Listening to and acting on student preferences, interests, and perspectives helps students feel invested in their own learning and can ignite passions that will increase their persistence. Encouraging student voice means to engage and empower students, both individually and collectively, and to act on their empowerment in the quest for meaningful instructional experiences that will support lifelong learning. Educational strategies can develop into different types of student voice that will prepare students to exercise their voice effectively into adulthood. The use of student voice, builds student engagement and agency as it is a key mechanism through which students develop assessment capability and become active participants in their learning. It can support the development of a student's sense of responsibility and ownership over their learning by connecting to what is real and important to them[12]. The concept of student voice should be actioned in many ways by encouraging reflective mindset as well as drawing attention on professional empowerment.

The didactic approach to the student voice focuses on the structure of a being-who-experiences, within which her/his internal variants can be evaluated, such as those of the subject who perceives, knows, acts, etc.

Such educational method, put in action within a pragmatist conceptual frame, could thus strengthen skills for social dialogue by endorsing all views of the ones involved in a given setting, by enabling each to learn from and about each other, so that students can try out inclusive patterns. Pragmatism by suggesting compromise rather than an either/or perspective, re-configures the space of feedback as the fertile ground on which individuals and ideas can be questioned, refined or even transformed.

Culture is not homogeneous whole, it is constituted through the narratives and symbolizations of their members, who articulates them in the course of partaking of complex social and significative practices. In this respect, knowledge and experience – within educational relation – move along a possible trajectory driven by the concept of social generativity and capacity approach. So forth, feedback takes on a socializing character, functional for the subject to achieve a freedom which is eventually linked to cooperation. As Dewey notes, in Democracy and Education, growth occurs when a student is socialized in ways that expand her/his intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic

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[12] Michael Fielding is one of the most-recognized researchers in the field of student voice around the world, among his numerous works on the matter one can refer to : Fielding M. (2012) From student voice to democratic community: new beginnings, radical continuities. In McMahon B. (Ed.), *Student Engagement in Urban Schools: Beyond Neo-liberal Discourses*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, pp. 11-27.

horizons and that enhance in him or her an awareness of connections and interrelations with other socializing forces. Educators and learners confront each other by delivering and validating a shared expertise on contents and methodologies.[13] The exercise of feedback may offer to learners the opportunity to explore various dimensions of identity – citizens and members of an ethical community – and construe self-regulated responses, strengthening the ability to transfer intellectual skills into professional prospects. Learners who are self-regulated set personal study scope, analyze their performance and determine its effectiveness to meet expectations. The possibility to engage in processes of will-and opinion formation allows learners to recognize how feedback is the practical/conceptual space-time to trial and enact also potential accommodations for civil society.

Learning processes take across historical phases of transition where any feedback is a passage within a longer hermeneutical journey through signs and symbols, beliefs and ideologies, technologies and policies that continually create, re-create and renegotiate knowledge as well as fashions to become social agents.

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[13] In chapter seven of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey tells us what he means by socialization: "Any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group." Cfr. Boyston J.A, edt. (1980). *The Middle Works of John Dewey (1899-1924)*. Carbondale-Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, Chapter 7, "The Democratic Conception in Education", MW.9.88).

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