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NEUTRALITY'S MUCH NEEDED PLACE IN DEWEY'S TWO-PART CRITERION FOR DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper examines methods provided by both John Dewey and Amy Gutmann. Dewey's method involves categorizing experiences and values amongst individuals. Gutmann's method involves neutrality through equality of information and presentations. My question revolves around how to create a fairer democratic education system that allows individuals to critically analyze every-day information. My analysis and conclusion combine the two methods to form a better method and solution. The solution is that values and experiences need to be learned through unbiased neutrality in order for individuals to form unbiased social groups that make up society. This implies that some of our current social groups possibly have a wall of ignorance about them that doesn't allow for fairness in a democratic education.

Neutrality's Much Needed Place in Dewey's Two-Part Criterion for Democratic Education

Introduction

In *Democracy and Education* Dewey presents a vision of how a public education system should be structured so as to best satisfy the needs of the citizens in a democracy. To pursue this vision, Dewey introduces a method for categorizing different forms of society. Dewey uses this categorization scheme to help understand what distinguishes democratic societies from other forms of group living. By understanding democracy's special characterization, Dewey hopes to be able to better outline a vision of education that is perfectly suited for democracy.

Dewey's two-part criterion is significant to a democratic society because in a democracy we exchange time and actions with so many different individuals on a day-to-day basis. Think about all the exchanges that take place between working, being in school, or just going out to eat; we find and meet tons of different people who share similar or differing values from us. The common values can build bonds in our

communities, which further develop our democratic system. The differing ideas also allow us to develop our democratic system, but with different ideas we learn other points of view and other beliefs. This allows us growth we would not be able to experience elsewhere if we just encountered the same beliefs constantly. Dewey's criteria directly correlate to these thoughts because we now have a tool that can properly measure these exchanges. We have the means of recognition that allows us to spot common interests and values not just amongst ourselves, but other individuals too.

Dewey's first criterion concerns all of the experiences that put together the growth of an individual. This is measurable because we can see how individuals in a democracy are different and comparable to individuals in other societies. Dewey's second criterion is explained as the exchange of experiences between individuals in society. We can use both of these criteria to essentially place forms of government on a scale measuring what common values and mutual interests individuals in that government have. Dewey explains that democracy is exceptionally special on this theoretical scale because we have more liberties, which allow individuals to pursue what they wish in life. Although we have different interests, this freedom to be different from each other is in fact a common value we have.

Below is textual information provided by Dewey, and it is the first mention of his two-part criterion. We have Dewey loosely explaining the importance of his criteria and why they are needed in a society not only for control but also for characterization:

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder (241-242).

Dewey even describes a "gang" of thieves who can hold certain interests in common. They all have a common standard that they want to steal and get money, but they question how consciously and freely they exchange with one another. This is why Dewey shows that the control we present through education can be used to form stronger communities especially in democracy. This strength can allow us to distinguish what common values we need to look for in society to make our democracy succeed.

Here we can look directly at what Dewey envisions when he describes the freedom of association between groups that have common, but limited, interests:

Now in any social group whatever, even in a gang of thieves, we find some interest held in common, and we find a certain amount of interaction and cooperative intercourse with other groups. From these two traits we derive our standard. How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association. If we apply these considerations to, say, a criminal band, we find that the ties which consciously hold the members together are few in number, reducible almost to a common interest in plunder; and that they are of such a nature as to isolate the

group from other groups with respect to give and take of the values of life (234).

Dewey is describing how groups with little in common can fall short of ever succeeding long term. A gang of thieves is doomed to fail because they can only cooperate on so many levels as a group. With his two-part criterion we can further categorize them in comparison to other groups.

In this paper I will explain why Dewey's two-part criterion fails to provide a solid and satisfying groundwork for fair and unbiased democratic education. This is because without stricter guidance Dewey's criteria leave room for biased education to take over. Students can potentially learn from educators who won't present certain information and a cycle of bias continues. I will present Amy Gutmann's idea of neutrality to make up for this lack of guidance. Through Gutmann I will show that her ideas of nonrepression and nondiscrimination complete the groundwork for a democratic education that Dewey has started. Combining Dewey and Gutmann's ideas will provide an ideal setup for democratic education and allow for more diverse exchanges between individuals.

Wall of Ignorance Caused by Dewey's Criteria

Although we share common values and ideas with others, there are characteristics in all our beliefs that set us apart from others. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey argues that our education system sets the foundation for any sort of development that we'll encounter, whether in schools or elsewhere. Dewey's two criteria function in education as measurements that develop children's beliefs and values. Dewey believes that just through these two criteria alone we can measure how comparable students in society are to one another. These two criteria connect to education by way of figuring out what children have in common to learn. We can measure what interests and values children have in common and place them where they need to be. Specifically, in a democratic society we trust that educators can provide specific information to children and that they learn that information. We examine these measurements and hope that children are learning material that is not biased. Perhaps this is not always the case

Experience is valuable because it leads to growth, and without growth we as a society will go nowhere in future progress. This is fine because it's true. The second criterion just goes far enough to say that everyone you encounter has something to offer in terms of growth. We go day-to-day meeting and exchanging information with all sorts of people. This is also true and this is also fine. But there is a persistent problem with the second criterion. Dewey's criteria are designed to help us categorize different forms of society by distinguishing them by the growth of their individuals, as well as the values that make up their society. But it seems impossible to accept the idea that these two criteria are enough to ensure that education will provide a fair and adequate opportunity for growth.

Imagine a small town in the United States that is just made up entirely of the same families that have lived in town for many generations. Supposed this small town is

made up of conservative families. The school system will become isolated and stagnant in a sense because of its lack of new families and individuals that could bring different ideologies like liberalism, socialism, nationalism, centralism, etc. There are no new values being taught and the exchanges between these people all stay the same. There are no other ideologies being taught because everyone already believes the same thing, so why learn something new? This happens and this is why Dewey's criteria aren't good enough for schools in a democracy. Dewey would probably want there to be other ideas, but would say the exchanges between individuals are fair because they're still "growing" through experiencing others. The problem is that these experiences are filled with the same common interests; these aren't new experiences. We need to allow for guidance in presenting other ideas. We have to account for opportunities that allow for diversity not only in individuals, but also in ideas. We learn from diversity. With just Dewey's criterion, there is room for growth, but there's no guarantee that individuals *have* to take other opportunities that would further develop them from what they already know or believe. In areas or people that have little diversity of beliefs, thoughts, and ideas, Dewey's criteria don't provide enough evidence for how to open them up to anything different than what they already know.

It seems to be the assumption that education happens to be the tool that opens the door to the capacity to learn. Dewey assumes that education will take care of introducing new ideas to students without any other guidance. I'm not entirely convinced that this is good enough. We can't assume that educators can and will do that. There needs to be a more concrete answer as to how and why education can dissolve our inability of learning from other social groups. There has to be some sort of guidance through education where we are forced to learn about as many sides of an idea that are currently available. Instead of a narrow society where conservatives teach conservatism, we would have stricter guidelines where we have educators teaching anarchism, conservatism, communism, socialism, religious ideologies, and anything else. This example isn't just for ideologies, but for most subjects that happen to have more than one possible side to them and have some sort of repressed information associated with them. Anything that could possibly have a wall of ignorance needs to be torn down. I believe I have found the tool that does this ignorance tearing: neutrality in education.

Neutrality's Place

Neutrality is what I believe Dewey is lacking. Students need to be open to critical thinking when it comes to education. If we base growth only off of exchanges in experience, then that might not be good enough. Experiences happen regardless of what education would provide. We must provide opportunities for students to see other sides of any and every idea, and these potential opportunities are what Dewey has left out of his grand scheme of education in a democratic society. We need to combine Gutmann's neutrality with Dewey's two-part criterion to create a more structuralizing process for society.

Neutrality is an idea that's presented in Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education*. Her definition of neutrality is a lack of bias that should be established through

education. Meaning that there should be a respect for each idea and the people developing those ideas. Educators should teach each subject without giving their own bias about what they believe, and teach differing ideas than what has already been presented. Neutrality is the balance of material that is to be learned: that both sides of a subject will be learned some how or another. For example, political ideologies would be taught fairly. Students would learn both capitalism and communism along with all ideologies in order to establish that students can have every option of a topic available to them.

The lack of bias is more clearly defined as nonrepression and nondiscrimination. Both of these terms are used in a school system to establish equality and fairness. Nonrepression refers to abolishing any sort of disfavor towards racial minorities or any group that could be repressed. Nondiscrimination refers to the requirement that all educable children be educated in a way that is satisfactory for the success of future stability in society as far as an education system can do so. Nonrepression is a fair idea because we would abandon any repression towards people or subject material so that information would be able to be expressed equally. Nondiscrimination is also fair because we allow everyone an equal chance to learn and participate in education. As neutrality cuts out any bias that might be established from educators, nonrepression works to secure that no specific group's ideas are repressed from being taught. There's critical value in learning about ideas that have been put aside because of bias. Nondiscrimination's connection to neutrality can be thought of in a similar way. Nondiscrimination ensures that ideas and groups won't be selected against in schools. Certain ideas won't have a bias against them anymore, and students who want to and need to learn will all be taught accordingly. With both of these ideas that make up neutrality, there's a respect given to every individual that the school system establishes to allow for fairness and equality in education.

Here are Gutmann's own words on nonrepression and nondiscrimination for further explanation of their importance. It's important to remember that respect for the individual in schools not only helps their education, but also helps build the structure of a democratic education:

Repression has commonly taken the more passive form of discrimination in schooling against racial minorities, girls, and other disfavored groups of children. The effect of discrimination is often to repress, at least temporarily, the capacity and even the desire of these groups to participate in the processes the structure choice among good lives. Nondiscrimination can thus be viewed as the distributional complement to nonrepression . . .

Nondiscrimination requires that *all* educable children be educated adequately to participate as citizens in shaping the future structure of their society (Gutmann, 341).

As previously stated, neutrality is the idea that the education system and it's educators don't discriminate or repress any group(s) that potentially make up any side of any subject material that could possibly be used to educate students. Neutrality can set up guidelines that allow for an incredible lack of bias in schools. This lack of bias is

what will make Dewey's two-part criterion a far superior outline for democratic education. Dewey's criteria never lay out a specific way that different social groups are supposed to intermingle and meet other social groups to establish these growth-building exchanges. If we don't allow for a wider sphere of experience we shouldn't expect our society to grow.

In the direct evidence below, it seems Dewey is even asking for something like neutrality and just can't place his finger on it. He explains the importance of understanding and flexibility in education:

A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secure flexible readjustments of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life in so far democratic. Such society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder (Dewey, 241-242).

Here Dewey leaves the door wide open for why neutrality is needed in his two-part criterion. Neutrality is the last piece to Dewey's puzzle. We cannot expect the two criteria Dewey has laid out for us to satisfy maintaining diverse social relationships, and we cannot understand what Dewey pictures as social control solely through education without knowing Gutmann's neutrality better.

Neutrality allows us to learn of other's values as well as other values we can find in certain subjects. It's hard to imagine every single subject known, and it's difficult to imagine people trying to learn it all. However, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try and broaden minds to go further into discovering other sides of what they already know or what they could potentially know. We have to at least have an equal playing field when going into education to be able to learn how to critically analyze what students are to be presented with.

If we don't allow discrimination and repression in our education system, not only for individuals of different social and ethnic groups but also for different ideas of thoughts on a subject that might be unpopular or less known, then we can produce students who are so well versed in thought that our society as a whole will be much better off as a democracy. This is because we will be able to keep reproducing neutrality generation after generation.

Conclusion

Between Dewey and Gutmann, I believe there is a complete and functional guideline for creating a democratic education that's based on fairness and balance. The members of a democratic society should be able to critically apply not only the information they've learned from their educational system, but also the skills of critical analysis they've learned. The mutual respect gained through neutrality should provide children with the hope of replicating nonrepression and nondiscrimination each generation to keep building onto the structure of a democratic education. Dewey's two-part criterion promotes experiences as growth and that we should have others learn

from one another to constantly keep improving themselves and learning. Gutmann's neutrality made up of nonrepression and nondiscrimination allows for equality and fairness when introducing individuals into education systems as well as for topics in education to get a fair shot at being taught by educators, and learned fairly by students.

It seems entirely rational to accept that we need the guidance of educators as well as the entirety of the world's environment to shape all of our beliefs, but that we need to critically observe all the options we might not know about because we've had a wall of ignorance placed around us for so long. This seems acceptable to reproduce generation after generation as a continual standard to hold democracies to. It also seems to be reasonable that this will preserve different ideas and thoughts we have left in the dust because of how we educate the youth now. Dewey's two-part criterion system is not a bad idea at all; it is just incomplete without Gutmann's neutrality on education. Together they make a stronger whole that is more appealing to the future success of any democracy.

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