

Education as a Moral Concept

Jurgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics and the Morality of Human
Development

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Abstract

This study is a philosophical examination of the fundamental normative status of the concept of education. If education has universal normative features, what are the conditions of possibility for these features? The thesis explores the extent to which and ways in which education specifically and human *development* more generally can be conceptualized and justified as a moral practice. It seeks to establish an ethics of human *development* that can serve as a normative standard upon which contemporary educational policies and practices can be critically assessed.

Chapter One describes three general approaches to practical reasoning about education. Chapter Two undertakes a critical analysis of the relationship between education and practical reason through a reconstruction of R.S. Peters' analysis of the concept of education. Peters argues that education is fundamentally a normative project of initiation into the good. Chapter Three rejects the initiation into the good argument and adopts Peter's procedural ethics to *develop* the thesis that education is fundamentally a matter of initiation into practical reasoning generally. Chapter Four undertakes a detailed account of Jurgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics. It examines the limitation of the Peters version of the initiation into practical reason argument and defends the view that Habermas' Discourse Principle (D) can better support the initiation argument. Chapter Five examines three competing applications of (D) to educational questions. It *concludes* that an appropriately conceived practical principle for the fundamental justification of educational policies will be reflected in an expanded procedural moral principle of universalization (U). Chapter Six describes and defends such a principle that includes epistemic prohibitions against what I term 'developmental coercion'. The prohibition against such coercion is argued to secure conditions of possibility for the justification of moral norms of

socialization and human development. In Chapter Seven, implications of morally legitimate socialization norms are explicated in more detail.

