

New Robes for an Old Order: Multicultural Education, Peace Education, Cooperative Learning and Progressive Education

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This paper examines three recent educational movements from a philosophical and historical perspective in order to identify and analyze the related philosophical underpinnings. Those approaches examined include multicultural education, peace education and cooperative learning. The origins and basic features of each educational movement are described briefly. Analysis is primarily concerned with goals and objectives and an examination of points common to the three approaches. The theoretical concern is that the underlying philosophical bases of these movements is not readily discernible due to the lack of the proponents of each approach to make these clear. The authors contend that the fundamental premise of these movements is remarkably like that of the Progressivist educational focus of this century. Two implications flow from this, namely that all "new" ideas need to be carefully examined for their relation to ongoing (or past) practice, and educators need to be more concerned about explicating premises when postulating new approaches.

Cet article examine trois mouvements récents en l'éducation, selon une perspective philosophique et historique, de façons à en analyser les fondements philosophiques. Les approches étudiées comprennent l'éducation multiculturelle, l'éducation de la paix et l'apprentissage coopératif. Les origines et les caractéristiques de base de chaque mouvement éducatif sont brièvement décrites. L'analyse se concentre surtout sur les buts et les objectifs et examine les points communs aux trois approches. Le problème théorique est que les fondements philosophiques sous-jacents à ces mouvements ne sont pas facilement discernables, car les partisans de chaque approche ont manqué de les expliciter. Les auteurs soutiennent que la prémisse de ces mouvements ressemble étonnamment à celle de l'éducation nouvelle à laquelle s'est attaché notre siècle. De là découlent deux implications, à savoir que toutes les idées dites "nouvelles" doivent être soigneusement examinées en ce qui concerne leur rapport avec la pratique actuelle (ou passée) et que les éducateurs doivent faire attention à mieux ou expliciter leurs prémisses lorsqu'ils suggèrent de nouvelles approches.

Our society's preoccupation with change is evident in most, if not all, aspects of

human endeavor. There is no question that change is real, comprehensive and rapid, and as such it presents educators with a dilemma. On the one hand, they are challenged to create new ways to meet the demands of the future, while on the other, they are expected to solve present-day problems surfacing in the wake of change. The range of problems which educators are expected to remedy is tremendous and goes well beyond the realm of knowledge in the traditional sense. Some problems concern relationships between people and competing value systems while others concern technological literacy; it is therefore not difficult to understand why educators are tempted to embrace the latest teaching method which purports to repair a current problem or promises to fashion better people and therefore a better world. Seldom is much thought given to the philosophical or ideological assumptions and evaluation instruments that these new approaches logically entail. As a result, such piecemeal efforts and concomitant internal discrepancies may spawn even more problems than they solve. When trial results in error more often than success, these approaches may be abandoned in favor of an even newer approach or a return to the "basics," thereby perpetuating the cycle. Moreover, the immediate educational demands of the present, and to a lesser extent the future, often occlude a broader historical and philosophical scope, thereby rendering the new construct precarious at best.

This study analyzes three current educational approaches from a philosophical and historical perspective. Careful scrutiny of these approaches, i.e. multicultural education, peace education and cooperative learning, all of which have emerged in the last two decades, reveals the extent to which they have their roots in a common source, namely, the Progressive Education movement of the twentieth century.

The three approaches under study have developed independently of each other and have experienced varying degrees of success in Canada. Multicultural education has experienced strong and steady growth since 1971 when support for it was enshrined in legislation. Cooperative learning, which originated in the United States, is currently making rapid inroads into Canada. Peace education, despite its support internationally, has been somewhat less successful in gaining a following in Canada. While these approaches do not claim a genealogical tie with Progressive Education, there are unmistakable parallels. The purpose here is to illuminate these parallels and assess their pedagogical implications.

Emergence of the Three Themes

It is somewhat ironic that multiculturalism in Canada emerged in the late 1960s as a by-product of the Federal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism which was designed to study the dual French/English nature of Canada. Although the Commission endorsed only English and French as Canada's official languages, it was also forced to confront the real nature of Canada, i.e., a mosaic of many cultures and ethnic groups. As a result, an official federal policy on multiculturalism was formulated, a policy which its makers expected to cut a broad swath through the institutions and lives of Canadians. The policy contained the promise that

“the Government of Canada would support all of Canada’s cultures and seek to assist, resources permitting, the development of those cultural groups which have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop, a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, as well as a clear need for assistance” (Hansard, 1971, pp. 8580-8581). In addition, the Government sought to tear down discriminatory barriers erected against members of cultural minority groups, to promote creative encounters between ethnic communities, and generally to alleviate prejudice on the basis of race, creed, culture, or belief.

Although the Federal policy helped to initiate a series of programs designed to preach the multicultural message, e.g., through Canada Council grants, the National Museum of Man, the National Film Board and the formation of an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee, the basic content and day-to-day application of the message was left to the schools. Today, children in all ten provinces and the Territories learn about Canada’s multicultural heritage. In addition, educators have devised a wide range of classroom techniques, field experiences and community and public awareness programs as a means of fostering better intercultural understanding (Friesen, 1985). Not surprisingly the market for appropriate curricula is flourishing. While there is some evidence that the federal policy on multiculturalism has affected other social institutions such as government, business, the media, churches and universities, if only at the level of policing institutional discrimination, there is less evidence that these legal measures have wrought changes in the hearts and minds of Canadians.

The peace education movement dates back to the late nineteen sixties when a variety of organizations, such as the International Association of Educators for World Peace (IAEWP), were established. By 1970, when it was formally founded in Oslo, Norway, the IAEWP boasted an international base, claiming that it represented over 6,000 members in 53 countries. Gradually, the peace education movement filtered down to the national and local levels, picking up supporters as it did so. One of the earliest Canadian variants was the Canadian Peace Research Institute, which under the direction of Norman Alcock, piloted a series of scientific studies into the causes and nature of war. Educational studies followed, including one which researched the extent to which peace studies or related concepts were included in formal curricula and reading materials in schools across Canada. Still later, the International Peace Research Association conducted a study on the promotion of peace studies in Canada generally (Ray, 1981). Unlike research on multicultural education, peace studies failed to develop a repertoire of programs or classroom materials and activities and subsequently were relegated to a lower priority when new curricula were developed.

Although the schools have failed to provide an active forum for peace studies, pro-peace concerns continue to capture the imagination and capitalize on the fears of the public at large. Organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament which is concerned about the “Star Wars” project promoted by the American government, Operation Dismantle which advocates an international arms freeze, and Project Ploughshares which is a pacifist organization

embraced by Quakers, Mennonites, Doukhobours and other peace groups, are presently flourishing in Canada. There is no shortage of activities for peace enthusiasts, whether they be armchair supporters or activists. These activities may range from public demonstrations for peace to the World Constitution and Parliament Association's provisional world parliament in the event of a sudden nuclear war, to seminars, workshops and public hearings by campus groups such as the Peace and Conflict Resolution Study Group at The University of Calgary. While the central goal of these groups and the activities they promote is undoubtedly a more peaceful world, their assumptions, theories, methods and scope may differ widely. This diversity presents some theoretical and practical problems for educators since peace studies are not yet available in neat, coherent packages suitable for classroom use. While the International Association of Educators for World Peace reflected this concern by organizing its 1985 world conference around the theme "Peace Education in Teacher Training Programs" (I.A.E.W.P., 1985), there is little other evidence to suggest a trend in this direction.

Of the three approaches under study, cooperative learning is most obviously a descendant of the Progressive Education movement developed by John Dewey and his associates. During the 1920s, research in social psychology focused on cooperation and competition, but it wasn't until the 1970s that these processes were applied to the classroom. Since then, classroom research on cooperative learning has not only evolved but proliferated, encompassing inner-city, suburban and rural schools, grades two to twelve, and subjects such as mathematics, language arts, social studies and reading. Cooperative learning promoters claim their method boosts academic achievement, enhances intergroup relations between able and academically handicapped students, raises students' self-esteem, fosters peer support, nurtures the development of internal locus of control, expedites classroom management, promotes altruism and increases perspective-taking abilities (Odynak, 1985).

Unlike multicultural education and peace studies which have a broad scope, the focus of cooperative learning is comparatively narrow, concentrating primarily on the immediate classroom environment. According to Roberta Dees, cooperation is a "learning mode" which helps students achieve learning objectives more efficiently (Dees, 1985). It does so by creating conditions which allow students to master content at a maximum rate, promote working together toward a common goal, and promote the single, group-developed product. Johnson and Johnson (1975) suggest that cooperative education also helps students master skills in an enjoyable way because it gives them the option to work individually or in groups. These authors warn, however, that an overemphasis on any one of these themes will undermine the others.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives set forth by the three approaches have personal, intergroup and global dimensions. Built on humanistic and liberal philosophical considerations, they embrace the notion of redemptive action and its corollary, social obligation. While earlier theories like those espoused by Progressive educators

were founded upon similar philosophical presuppositions, it is the work of social scientists that has legitimized the value of personal and social redemption. On the social level, they have toppled the artificial hierarchy constructed by social Darwinism, by showing that all humans are members of a single species and that any differences between groups of people are less significant than those between people in these groups. Since human differences are largely the product of the social environment, attitudes of racism and ethnocentrism are unfounded, irrational and based on myth. On the personal level, social scientists have found that persons who exhibit these attitudes often have maladjusted, rigid authoritarian personalities. They suggest that these dysfunctional attitudes can and must be changed both for the health of the individuals exhibiting them and for the sake of social harmony, and be replaced with attitudes reflecting tolerance, and with the belief that all people are of equal worth (van den Berghe, 1981). Research shows that societies everywhere value respect for others and equality as quality of life indicators. Thus, philosophical considerations, social science research and social values combine to present a social obligation and therefore a pedagogical mandate. In other words, the school as a primary agent of socialization has the responsibility to create enlightened, well-adjusted, respectful members of society. Without this understanding of the role of the school in society, multicultural education, cooperative learning and peace studies would not exist.

The three approaches under review share John Dewey's appreciation for democratic principles. For instance, multiculturalists urge educators to help students "recognize the positive nature of our pluralistic society with its cultural and ethnic diversity and to appreciate the contributions of all groups to our national culture (Tiedt & Tiedt, 1979, pp. 1-2). This concern is amplified by peace education advocates when they maintain that their approach will further social progress and global stability by enhancing understanding between nations (Ross, 1973). The cooperative educators make considerably more modest claims by suggesting that each individual's contribution is important if the goals set by the group are to be achieved. Thus, there appears to be a progressive relationship among these approaches: cooperative learning enthusiasts are concerned primarily with the beneficial results of group goals for individual progress and define the group as immediate and social; multiculturalists define the group as culturally based or in terms of a nation state; peace educators define the group in the context of the global village. Nonetheless, promoters of all three approaches stress the importance of positive interaction between people, whether between individuals or groups. This coincides with Dewey's notion that teachers should prepare students for living in a democratic society by encouraging positive social interactions in the classroom. While many teachers work to create a positive learning environment as a matter of course, or as a precondition for classroom management, multiculturalists and peace educators view this as serving more lofty social ends.

The claims made by the three approaches with respect to conflict resolution may appear somewhat unrealistic on the surface, yet each is prepared to meet

social conflict head on. Many peace educators recognize the inevitability of social conflict and suggest that peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but entails "learning to live with conflict" in a constructive manner (Wintch, 1971). They say the process begins when students learn to handle conflict on an individual basis and in the spirit of wisdom, charity and duty. Multiculturalists recommend facing potentially divisive individual and cultural differences openly by teaching students to confront their own biases. They have developed a variety of preventive and interventionist classroom techniques ranging from addressing the conflict indirectly, through parables or myths, to interviewing students who represent different cultures. Cooperative learning advocates place less emphasis on confronting differences since their approach rests on the premise that cooperation significantly reduces the importance of differences and suppresses any that do exist. According to Emily Odynak, "equal status is achieved by making each student's contribution equally important to the group's success. In a cooperative learning environment, the presence of students of different levels of ability and diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds is seen as a strength, not a weakness" (Odynak, 1985).

While the three approaches appear to place the group's interests ahead of the individual's, there is nonetheless a suggestion of individualism in each. Like the Progressive educators before them, promoters of the three approaches adhere to the principle of developing the potential of the individual student even though the reasons vary. Peace study advocates argue that personal fulfillment is a prerequisite for world peace, stating that "the individual must be helped to develop his full potential for constructive, peaceful living" (Ross, 1973). Cooperative educators add a sociological twist to this notion by suggesting that students be taught the values, habits, knowledge, attitudes and skills they will need to assume specific adult roles. In fact, they argue that the school's mandate to develop each student to his or her maximum potential stems from its role as an agency which socializes the young into adult society (Johnson & Johnson, 1975). These educators believe that a fulfilling life in a complex democratic industrial society is based on acceptance of sanctioned adult roles which are imposed on the individual by society. Multiculturalists, however, believe that peace begins with self-acceptance including cultural background and personal identity rather than the imposition of social norms and roles. For them, self-acceptance is a prerequisite for accepting others. Tiedt and Tiedt quote an ancient Chinese proverb which simply describes the progression from self to other:

If there is right in the soul,
There will be beauty in the person;
If there is beauty in the person,
There will be harmony in the home;
If there is harmony in the home,
There will be order in the nation;
If there is order in the nation,
There will be peace in the world.

(Tiedt & Tiedt, 1979, p. 54)

It is apparent that all three approaches attempt to balance social obligations and the welfare of others with the self-fulfillment of the individual. While their proponents may set and defend this balance in somewhat different ways, they are agreed that maximizing personal development is a prerequisite to a more peaceful society. Advocates of the three models are quite willing to expound eloquently on the benefits and objectives of their particular brand of education, but they are often more reluctant to discuss the philosophical underpinnings of their approach. This naturally raises fundamental questions which must be answered if these approaches wish to avoid the dustbin of educational fads. Educators need to know whether they represent new theoretical constructs or whether they are simply new habits for an old order. If their similarities with Progressive Education are more than superficial and if they indeed rest on the philosophical premises of Progressive Education, then this should be clearly stated. Because schooling has such a profound influence on children, it is simply unethical for educators to buy into the latest educational fad or disregard the practical implications of philosophical theories. In the words of John Dewey:

The difference between educational practices that are influenced by a well-thought-out philosophy, and practices that are not so influenced, is that between education conducted with some clear idea of the ends in the way of ruling attitudes or desire or purpose that are to be created, and an education that is conducted blindly, under the control of customs or traditions that have never been examined or in response to immediate social pressure.

(Archambault, 1964, p. 17)

Theoretical Considerations

Ever since the Progressive Education movement challenged the assumptions of its theoretical predecessors, educators have argued over the direction which education should take. Some educators are critical that no new theories have emerged to replace Progressive Education, and others believe that no new theories need to be developed until Progressive Education is fully implemented.

Careful scrutiny reveals the extent to which the theoretical ideas of Progressive Education have infiltrated revised social studies courses. These courses are conceptually-based rather than content-oriented, a typical feature of Progressive Education (MacIver, 1969). Moreover, current teacher training courses currently emphasize concept teaching, an approach which can be applied to every discipline in the school curriculum. It is necessary, however, to go beyond superficial congruence and return to an analysis of the basic presuppositions inherent in Progressive Education. This analysis must include assumptions regarding the nature of man, the nature of society (particularly government), and the nature of truth (Bayles, 1966).

Traditional education rested on the assumption that man was basically evil; for instance, the early Puritan Americans believed that children were destined for a life of evil and eternal damnation unless the educational system intervened by subjecting them to a religiously-based curriculum. Progressivists like John Dewey attempted to be more objective. From their observations, they deduced that man was neutral in nature and became good or evil depending on the interaction between the individual and society. They concluded that since personal actions

were motivated by private, individualistic perceptions of the present situation and future consequences, behavior was largely unpredictable. This understanding led them to recommend that education be tailored to suit individuals, not groups. They further suggested that for the individual to become a fully functioning member of society, the school, as a microcosm of society, must be a place where children were constantly interacting positively with others. Individual children would ultimately formulate their own opinions based on their perceptions, but these would be constructive and positive opinions if the right kind of interaction occurred. The key here is the concept of reciprocal interaction. The school environment would act on the child, but the child would also be allowed to act on the school environment (Dewey, 1916). It is easy to see that this notion of interaction is a fundamental concept for the promoters of cooperative education. Their entire approach emphasizes the extent to which individual behavior is modified by the group.

Debates on what constitutes truth have raged among philosophers of every generation. Unable to settle the question with any degree of consensus, many conclude the quest by paying homage to superimposed moral absolutes. However, the Progressivists took a skeptical attitude towards the notion of absolute truth. They were pragmatists who preferred to allow truth to emerge naturally from experience. They encouraged the development of individual truth, believing that only truth worked out and embraced in this way could have any real meaning, but the final verification was the consensus arrived at through social interaction. Dewey was even more exact, and insisted on a verification process which is actually a simplified version of the inquiry method: the problem is stated, a possible hypothesis is formulated and tested, and a conclusion is made (Bode, 1921). Dewey contended that everything from so-called laws of nature to individual perceptions should be subjected to the scrutiny of the scientific test so that opinion could be separated from scientifically deducible conclusion. Multiculturalists welcome such a definition of truth because it undermines the ethnocentric stance of people who claim they have cornered the market on truth. When multicultural educators encourage their students to respect the customs and traditions of another person from a different culture, they are essentially acknowledging the validity and integrity inherent in different culturally-based systems of belief. However, the process of determining the truth does not end with respect. Rather, respect provides the foundation for developing any kind of positive, constructive interaction between people. It is through this interaction that the truth is allowed to surface, naturally and from within.

Although Progressivists questioned the conventional wisdom of the day, they were not inclined to question the value of democracy, either as a system of government or as a human ideal. They viewed education as a primary vehicle for preparing students to live in American society. Theoretically, American democracy was built on three assumptions: People have the power to make and change laws of their land; they have an obligation to abide by those laws made as a result of participation in the decision-making process; and they are assured equal rights

and privileges under the laws of the land (Bayles, 1966). It follows that participation in the decision-making process can only be valid if individuals possess certain skills. Aside from basic literary skills, critical thinking or reflective skills are essential and the classroom is the logical place to begin teaching these skills. A careful look at the specific classroom programs of multicultural education and cooperative learning reveals an excellent application of this theory. Multiculturalists emphasize this approach because they believe that every student should have an equal opportunity to participate in his or her education. They also believe that critical thinking is an appropriate vehicle to break down ethnocentrism. For them, every person's experience and opinion is as valid and valuable as the next, and no culture can claim omniscience. Cooperativists go further and use the democratic process and critical thinking as a method of inquiry and as a teaching and learning mode. They also believe that each person's contribution has meaning and integrity.

It is somewhat ironic that Progressive Education was never fully implemented, probably because its underlying democratic assumptions were not acceptable to large numbers of people in the early part of this century. At that time, education was highly content-oriented; many people thought that teachers should teach the subject rather than the child and children were taught what to think, not how to think. Also, in practice, Progressive Education seemed almost too democratic in the sense that it stressed equality between people. Even some of the most enlightened social reformers of the early twentieth century subscribed to social Darwinism, a theory which ranked people, cultures and society in a hierarchy that was largely constructed by people with narrow ethnocentric perspectives. The democratic impulses of Progressive Education may finally be finding expression in the three approaches under study.

As has been shown, there is much evidence that multicultural education, peace studies and cooperative learning are actually applications of Progressive Education in disguise and the fact that their proponents do not clearly articulate their assumptions about truth, value and reality may be to their advantage. Unlike Progressive Education, these approaches may not become targets for opposition simply because they minimize their philosophical implications. If this is so, then these approaches are presented with a real conundrum. If they expose the full implications in a coherent manner, i.e., philosophical assumptions and evaluation techniques in addition to teaching methods, they may attract opposition. If they keep them hidden, however, then teachers may continue to use them in a piecemeal fashion, thereby undermining the integrity of each approach. In fairness, some authors such as Johnson and Johnson do admit that their theories are based on humanistic thinking. However, by defining their orientation as an "education that promotes the compassionate use of reason in dealing with other humans . . ." and by devoting only two pages to this discussion, their statements are reduced to platitudes (Johnson & Johnson, 1975, p. 15-16).

Implications

While the foregoing analysis is not as extensive as it might be, there is much

evidence that Progressive Education is still alive and well and living in our schools today in the form of multicultural education, peace studies and cooperative learning. The point to be made here, however, is not about Progressive Education itself; rather, it is that educators need to assess these approaches critically before embracing them whole-heartedly. This is necessary for several reasons. Educators need to establish the extent to which their own philosophy of education is compatible with the implicit assumptions of the approach they use. Also, they must be able to defend their choice of approach to their public. More than ever before, teachers must be able to develop an internal consistency between learning objectives, methods and evaluation. The following suggestions will help them to do so.

It is incumbent upon educational theorists to be more explicit about their assumptions so that a prospective disciple fully understands the new approach. It is all too easy to adopt an attractively-packaged educational approach only to discover that it contradicts the basic assumptions of the teacher, school, or curriculum. For example, peace educators assume that everyone wants a better world, but they rarely reveal their humanistic leanings. The multiculturalists' goal of tolerance and understanding is also laudable; however, their corollary belief that one cultural system is as good as any other is unattractive to those who believe that some value systems are more socially acceptable and indeed morally superior to others and as such should be inculcated in the schools. And while many people give lip service to the value of cooperation, a highly competitive ethic still permeates and defines much of North American society.

It is often unpopular to examine critically the status quo in our society, especially with respect to the superiority of our system over systems that appear less democratic, less technologically advanced, less defined by the accoutrements of civilization as we know it, and less wealthy. This reluctance should not deter educators but rather should challenge them to develop and articulate a fully developed and defensible educational philosophy that integrates the best features of the status quo and replaces the worst. Even in their attenuated form, the three approaches offer the beginnings of viable alternatives. Peace educators connect the macro- and microcosm by developing the individual's global awareness and social conscience. As the globe continues to shrink, causing events to ricochet off each other more quickly than ever before, and actions on one part of the globe cause instant reactions on all other parts of the globe, the lessons of peace education are both timely and necessary. Multiculturalists offer the individual self-worth and identity in a world which becomes increasingly impersonal and standardized. Cooperative education teaches negotiation and other interpersonal skills, and also offers a plausible method for reducing interpersonal and even international conflict.

While these approaches may not be fully developed in the ways suggested earlier, they do present attractive and dynamic alternatives to traditional content-oriented education. Whether they have or have not borrowed, even if unwittingly, from Progressive Education, is not a point of contention here. Rather, Progressive

Education, as well as the other philosophies, provides a useful reference point for comparing these newer approaches. Such an analysis does not merely show similarities and differences; it also illuminates internal inconsistencies and lacunae which need to be filled. This is something which must be done if educators are to live up to their mandate as responsible custodians of the next generation of decision-makers.

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