

MUS 782

Discussion 3 – Stanford Article, Sections 3 & 4

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Continue reading from the Stanford University document. Read sections 3-4 and talk about your understanding of the content. Also include in your discussion this time your thoughts about the following: What do you think is the difference between ethics and morals?

Education is a huge field that is nearly impossible to describe in one book/volume. The Stanford article mentions *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education* by Curran that is 600+ pages and has 45 chapters to attempt to explain the complex field. Another book, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* by Siegel, is similar in size and wide range of topics relating to philosophy as it pertains to education. That being said, Stanford chose to highlight the following areas of contemporary work in the field: 1. curriculum content, 2. social/moral/political philosophy, 3. epistemology of education, and 4. disputes concerning empirical education research.

1. Curriculum content is a huge issue and one that is not easily solved. Technical issues can include proper order/sequencing of topics, time allocated to each topic, lab work and/or excursions appropriate for each topic, etc. Deeper issues surface when considering what is included or excluded in the dissemination of information at former educational institutions. Examples likely to require justification validity include evolution, birth control, patriotism, Holocaust, etc.

The justification issue can be further explained by answering the following questions: What are the aims and functions of school?; Is it justifiable to treat the curriculum as a way to further the interests of a dominant group?; and Should educational programs have disparate or the same offerings?

Some aims of schooling include production and knowledge and knowledgeable students, fostering of curiosity, enhancement of understanding, growing the imagination, civilizing the students, fostering rationality and/or autonomy, and the development of care, concern, attitudes, dispositions in students. But, defining each one of these aims leads to disagreements. For example, autonomy can be defined as preparing students to think/act for themselves or simply treating students with respect as persons.

The second question is whether or not it's justifiable to use curriculum as a way to further socio-political interests of a dominant group, any particular group, your own interests, and/or to use it as a way to control or a social engineering agenda. Research on this subject does show that oftentimes, education indeed does reflect and promote the powerful cultural elites in a given society. Scheffler argued that the function of education is to liberate the mind, allow it to think critically, impart knowledge, and encourage independent thinking.

The third question involves the offerings of education programs. The argument is: Should a school have different offerings based on student competence and interest, or should everyone receive the exact same curriculum? The consensus seems that a more diverse education track is beneficial for all involved since student engagement would remain high.

2. Social, political, and moral philosophy

Justice in educational distribution is a difficult thing to ensure. Basically, the "fair equality of opportunity" means that social position should not play a role in the quality of education received. I can see where this is a constant struggle since property taxes largely fund schools. More affluent neighborhoods pay more in taxes, thereby ensuring more money per student allocated in higher social classes. How do you remedy that? Emphasis has been placed on giving the lower social classes more attention and resources, but the gap remains large.

Also, the question of whether patriotism is deemed a virtue causes much controversy. How do you define citizenship within our "melting pot" and give definition and meaning to everyone's culture and ideals? Emphasis has been placed on understanding and appreciating the diverse lives of our nation's citizens.

Virtue ethics has become an alternative to deontological and consequentialist theories. Deontological theory suggests that actions are good or bad according to a clear set of rules. Consequentialist theory suggests an action is good or bad depending upon its outcome. Virtue ethics is the quest to understand and live a life of moral character. There is no clear preferred theory, but virtue ethics is popular because it suggests life and actions are a journey and that the right or wrong nature of actions are not clearly or easily defined.

3. Epistemology of Education

Epistemology is defined as the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge. The main debate is whether the epistemic aim of education is truth or critical thinking/rational belief. Further discussion centers on whether or not students can trust the testimony of their teachers. As students get older they can use more tools to discern the plausibility of the testimony: compare

them with other opinions, assess the teacher's reasons, complete an independent evaluation, etc.

Again, the issue of education versus indoctrination is mentioned. In general, education creates open-mindedness. On the contrary, indoctrination intends to tell students what to think or believe based on studying the aims/intentions of the teacher, methods employed, and content transmitted.

4. Disputes concerning empirical education research

This involves the age-old debate of whether quantitative or qualitative research is the superior method for research, which is known as the "paradigm wars." Quantitative (experimental) researchers believe their method is the best way to validate claims and causal factors, while criticizing the qualitative research as weak. Qualitative (case studies) researchers feel their methods are superior because they take a more holistic view of causation, especially role of motives and reasons, gathering relevant background knowledge, realizing cultural norms, etc. Largely, there has been movement to accept "mixed methods research" which combine the best aspects of both types of research within the same study.

Difference between ethics and morals?

During my research for this, I found much discrepancy over definitions – some even said they were the exact same thing – so clearly there is still some debate over ethics and morals. My take is that morals are guiding principles, most oftentimes taken on by an entire group (community, culture, nation, etc.), and are generally the way people decide if something is good or bad. Morals are the basis for ethics – i.e. ethics are created after you settle on morals. Ethics are a specific set of rules and actions created to influence an individual's decisions/choices. Both the Bar Association and Medical Association have an ethics code to encourage their professionals to act properly and keep the profession looking positive.

Reference

Phillips, D. C., & Siegel, H. (2013). Philosophy of Education. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Winter 2013. from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/education-philosophy/>