



# PRAGMATISM AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** As the word Pragmatic means the quality of dealing with the problem in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exists, rather than following a fixed theories, ideas or rules. Pragmatism is an educational philosophy that says education should be teaching students the things that are practical for life and encourages them to grow into better people. Many famous educators including John Dewey, William James were pragmatists. Pragmatists believe in the idea of practical learning i.e. education should apply to the real world. Thus, this paper examines Pragmatism, its contribution to education. It further discusses how the basic principles of pragmatism can be applied in learning thereby making the process of teaching-learning more effective.

**Index Terms - Learning, Method of Teaching, Pragmatism, Values**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'Pragmatism' derives its origin from a Greek word 'Pragma' meaning 'Activity' or 'Practice' or 'Action'. As action gets priority over thought, Pragmatism is also known as 'Expenditure' which believes in 'practicability' or 'utility' depending upon the truth, reality, goodness or badness which are all relative terms and are not predetermined or absolute. Pragmatism tends to hold the idea that the truth/fact of yesterday needs to be experienced truly, today and tomorrow. It idealizes the activity on the basis of its consequence over time frame. In short, it conceptualizes an inference on the basis of changed or changing needs, circumstances and places.

Pragmatists believe that no truth is absolute and permanent as it is ever changing from time to time and place to place and from circumstance to circumstance. Thus, their fundamental start is "change". Whatever was true yesterday need not be the true today. The philosophy of pragmatists is predetermined to those ideas and values which result in utility to mankind in certain time, place or circumstance rather than any predetermined of life.

Pragmatic philosophy is a practical philosophy having no fixed or absolute standards. Man always creates new values and education should help him in doing so. Being practical and utilitarian school of philosophy, Pragmatism has influenced education to the maximum extent. It has tried overcoming the limitations of other schools like idealism and naturalism and has influenced the world to a great extent.

The chief exponents of Pragmatism are: C.B. Pierce, Archie J. Balm, John Dewey, William James, Will Durrant and Shiller. For Pragmatism, "Experience" is at the centre of the universe. Hence, it lays emphasis upon man made ideas and values resulted by the experimental activities.

## II. PRAGMATISM AND AIMS OF EDUCATION

Pragmatists believe that life is dynamic which is subjected to constant change; hence the aims of education are bound to be dynamic. According to them, Education deals with human life, so it must help the children to fulfill their biological and social needs. Education should enable a child to create values in his life. In the words of Ross, education must create new values: “the main task of educator is to put the educand into a position to develop values for him”.

The aims of education as formulated by the Pragmatists are the following:

- ❖ **To create new values:** The Pragmatists do not believe in the theory of any fixed aim of education. In their opinion, the aim of education is to create new values and the act of teacher is to help himself develop new values.
- ❖ **To enable pupils to gather experience through activity:** For the creation of new values, activity and experience are essential. Education should therefore, provide physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetic activities as the media for the creation of new values.
- ❖ **To help the pupil to adjust with him and the society:** The other important aim of education according to pragmatism is to help the pupil to make adjustment with himself and the society.
- ❖ **To help the pupil to reconstruct his experience:** Every individual has to solve different types of complex problems in his life. So the another important aim of education, according to Pragmatism is to enable the pupil to form such an outlook about life as can help to tackle successfully the different problems of his life in future,
- ❖ **To make all round development of the pupil:** All round development of the individual is also an important aim of education. The individual develops physically, mentally, socially and aesthetically.

## III. CONTRIBUTION OF PRAGMATISM TO EDUCATION

*“Activity lies at the centre of all educative process. The basis of all teaching is the activity of the child”*  
- Foster

Education is preparation for life. Pragmatism makes a man socially efficient. They believe that the children should not be asked to work according to predetermined goals. They should rather determine their goals according to their needs and interests. Pragmatism is based on the psychology of individual differences. Pragmatists want education according to aptitudes and abilities of the individual. Every individual must be respected and education should be planned to cater his inclinations and capacities.

According to pragmatism, the theory and practice of education is based on two main principles, namely (i) Education should have a social function and (ii) Education should provide real life experience to the child. Broadly, pragmatism and education can be discussed as follows:

- ❖ Every continuous experience or activity is educative and all education in fact, resides in having such experience. But continuous growth in experience is not the whole education. Education is something more. It is constant reorganizing or reconstructing of experience.
- ❖ Pragmatism provides definite aims of education. The student is prepared to live in a society and learn skills and attitude.
- ❖ The teaching methods are based on learning by doing. The project method is the contribution of pragmatism to modern education.
- ❖ Pragmatism encourages a democratic way to learning through purposeful and co-operative projects and activities.
- ❖ Utility in the educative process is the first criterion. The school is expected to provide learning experiences that are useful.
- ❖ Education is not bound to tradition. Pragmatic philosophers advice us to test everything through our own experience.
- ❖ The teacher has to play a very challenging role in the education process under pragmatism and he has to be very alert and watchful.

## IV. PRAGMATISM AND CURRICULUM

In the field of curriculum development, the following principles have been prescribed by the pragmatists.

### 1. Principle of Utility:

According to this principle only those subjects, activities and experiences should be included in the curriculum which are useful to the present needs of the child and also meet the future expectations of adult life as well. The subjects are such as Language, Physical well being, Physical training, Geography, History, Science, Agriculture and Home Science for girls.

### 2. Principle of Interest:

According to this principle, only those activities and experiences where the child takes interest are of four varieties namely (i) Interest in conversation (ii) Interest in investigation (iii) Interest in construction and (iv) Interest in creative expression. Keeping these varieties of interest in view at the primary stage, the curriculum should include writing, counting, art, craft-work, natural science and other practical work of simple nature.

### 3. Principle of Experience:

The third principle of pragmatics curriculum is the child's activity, vocation and experience. All these three should be closely integrated. The curriculum should consist of such varieties of learning experiences which promote original thinking and freedom to develop social and purposeful attitudes.

### 4. Principle of Integration:

Pragmatic curriculum deals with the integration of subjects and activities. Pragmatists want to construct flexible, dynamic and integrated curriculum which aids the developing child and the changing society more and more as he/she needs, demands and situation requires.

## V. PRAGMATISM AND METHOD OF TEACHING

Teaching-learning process is social and bi-polar process. Learning takes place as an interaction between the teacher and the taught. Pragmatism gives priority to the taught. Similarly, between the thought and action, it gives priority to action. They prefer practical over theory based teaching-learning process.

The pragmatists have completely discarded the conventional method of teaching and laid emphasis on the invention of new methods. The whole emphasis of method of teaching in pragmatism is on child, not the book of the teacher or the subject. The dominant interest of the child is 'to do' and 'to make'. The method should be flexible and dynamic. Pragmatists believe that minds of different children are different. Hence, we cannot have a fixed method of teaching which can be useful to all situations.

Learning by doing and the project methods have an important place in the methods of teaching proposed by the pragmatists. All learning must come as a product of action. Learning by doing makes a person creative, confident and co-operative. They also put on emphasis on the discovery and enquiry method. The techniques which follow the principle of learning by doing can be used according to pragmatists view.

## VI. PRAGMATISM AND TEACHER

In the opinion of pragmatists the duty of the teacher is to create such an environment in the school where pupils will have to face different problems relating to real life and will take interest in the solution of those problems.

Pragmatism regards teacher as a helper, guide and philosopher. The chief function of a pragmatic teacher is to suggest problems to his pupil and to stimulate them to find by themselves the solution which will work. The teacher must provide opportunities for the natural development of innate qualities if the children. His main task is to suggest problem to his student/pupils and to guide them to find out he solutions.

## VII. PRAGMATISM AND DISCIPLINE

Pragmatists have opposed against the imposition of rules and regulations to pupils. They believes in social and personal discipline, In their opinion if we give them opportunities to participate in different types of collective activities spontaneous discipline will grow in them. Pragmatists believe that play and work should be combined and this combination will perform a mental attitude and discipline. By taking part in such activities the qualities like tolerance, sympathy, mutual respect, attitude of service will be developed in them. Discipline cannot be maintained through force and domination. Children should be left free in order to develop freely and harmoniously.

According to pragmatists rewards and punishment are of no significance in the process of learning. They believed that no moral standard of values are already established. The philosophy believes in discipline, but the discipline should not be the outcome of external force it should be backed by freedom and joy. It advocates on discipline based on the principles of child's activities and interests. It upholds discipline based on social and mutual understanding. It believes in engaging the children free and real activities of human life.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The practical outlook and utilitarian philosophy of Pragmatism has tremendously influenced the education system in the present world. The study has found that the activity based teaching and learning method have turned the educational process to become purposeful. It has certainly infused a sense of reality in education. This experimental character of education enunciates the values in a child through his ideas. Pragmatism makes him optimistic, energetic, creative and active.

According to Pragmatism, education is not the dynamic side of philosophy as advocated by the idealists. It is the philosophy which emerges from an educational practice. Every individual has a social self and he can be best developed in and through society. Thus, we can conclude by saying that that Pragmatism has brought democracy in education. The students learn the technique of managing their own responsibilities which would prepare them to face the different challenges of real life. It makes a man socially efficient i.e. he can determine his goals according to his needs and interests.

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