"WHY DID THE STUDENT CROSS THE ROAD?"
BRIDGING THE GAP TO ALIGN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES

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Abstract: A review of philosophies governing educational practices is provided in order to compare the alignment of the goals promoted by major philosophical movements with effective practices in education. After evaluating the goals of progressive philosophy, behaviorism, Western ethics, and LREs, strategies to teach all students—including those who have disabilities—are suggested to bridge the gap between the philosophical goals of education and its practices. By incorporating explicit social and behavioral skills and strategies in addition to effective instruction into the classroom, teachers can enable all students to engage in the world beyond the classroom.

Key Words: *progressive philosophy, LRE, educational practice, effective teaching, behaviorism, educating all students*

Introduction

In any school setting and in any country, the ultimate goal is to enable students to prosper as citizens and engage in the community around them. Students with disabilities often struggle to assimilate behaviors crucial to success, such as being on-task, and are denied access to opportunities to engage. In addition to mastering academic curriculum, it is important for students to generalize and maintain useful life skills, especially choice making and social skills, so that they are able to adapt and respond appropriately to circumstances they will encounter in the world. A teacher's job can be seen as providing students with the strategies needed to procure for themselves the ability to exercise the options available in life. If a student demonstrates through inadequate grades or inappropriate behavior that he is unable to benefit from the curriculum in a general education setting, it is not only a scientific and legal responsibility for the teachers to provide services that enable the student to engage in as many environments as possible, but also an ethical one. With this understanding of the purpose for education, it is crucial for teachers to evaluate the underlying philosophies that influence classroom practices in order to assess if those practices are maximizing the time that teachers have with students.

Educational Philosophies Affecting Common Practices

To ensure that all students receive an appropriate, or *fair*, education, they should be educated in the least restrictive environment that will accommodate their needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004). Every student starts off with the assumption of a general

education setting until his teachers, parents, and/ or educational experts can show that his needs are not being met there. This multidisciplinary team must consider the general well being of the student in addition to his academic accommodations, so that the student can actively participate in the curriculum on par with state expectations as well as engage in appropriate levels of peer interaction and socialization. In this way, the appropriate placement reflects *fair* treatment of the student and his peers so that all are provided with as many opportunities to learn as possible. Finding a balance between meeting the social and academic needs of a student with disabilities and respecting the rights of their peers to learn can be an arduous task.

In the last century, the philosophy of progressive education has had great influence on the interpretation of *fair* education, emphasizing full inclusion in the schools world-wide. Mesibov and Shea (1996) report that advocates claim benefits such as "increased expectations, positive behavioral modeling by general education peers, more learning, higher self-esteem, more accepting attitudes by peers, and less isolation and stigma associated with pullout classes" when students of all abilities are placed in a general education classroom, no exceptions (p. 338). This ideal is based on educational practices that promote "true knowledge" and interrelationships taught holistically and naturalistically in order to "raise student interest, fix learning vividly in students' memories, induce love of learning, and stimulate students' creativity and individuality" (Hirsch, 1996). In addition, proponents of this philosophy believe that socialization is a higher skill for survival than academic knowledge, which is provided in full-inclusion classrooms to both students with disabilities and their typically developing peers (Kohn, 1999).

In 1992, noted American behaviorist Lindsley commented upon the progressive philosophy that many teachers have been "seduced by natural learning approaches… Most educators have bought the myth that academic learning does not require discipline—that the best learning is easy and fun" (Hempenstall, 1999). BF Skinner also provided commentary:

> "Even our best schools are under criticism for their inefficiency in the teaching of drill subjects such as arithmetic. The condition in the average school is a matter of widespread national concern… [teachers] spend as little time as possible on drill subjects and eagerly subscribe to philosophies of education which emphasize material of greater inherent interest. A confession of weakness is their extraordinary concern lest children be taught something unnecessary… Eventually weakness of technique emerges in the disguise of a reformulation of the aims of education. Skills are minimized in favor of vague achievements-- educating for democracy, educating the whole child, educating for life, and so on" (Epstein, 1982).

A century after the progressive education movement began, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated that in 2011, 37% of schools were failing to meet state standards, and that the statistic could jump to 82% as states attempt to ameliorate funding discrepancies (Armario, 2011). One must question the fairness of continuing in philosophical practices that perpetuate failure for so many schools.

One reason that progressive educational philosophy is so prevalent may be its strong basis in the Western understanding of ethics. Even at the roots of Western philosophy, it was believed that: "knowledge of the good would seem to be the concern of the most authoritative science… So, in any subject, the person educated in it is a good judge of that subject, and the person educated in

all subjects is a good judge without qualification" (Aristotle, trans. 2000, 1094a-1095a). In order to achieve one's essence in accordance with an Aristotelian virtue, knowledge of the good must be learned— through education. Aristotle's education-based ethics is so prevalent in the modern Western world that his view is subsumed in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There is no individual who is born and lives truly autonomously, and so each must learn morals through training by elders until he can eventually make an autonomous decision through habit (Aristotle, trans. 2000). Therefore, it is this trained autonomy that even allows education to be considered a right.

\Presidential movements and mandates in the United States such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have indicated that leadership believes that education is crucial to the ability to choose and so is a right of every citizen. If it is believed that the students placed in more structured special education environments are not able to pursue their own ends because they are denied the means of attaining them, then their right to act autonomously has been violated, which is against the theories of Immanuel Kant (1994), the father of modern philosophy as it is typically applied in Western society. To place children in the type of situation juxtaposed to the full inclusion classroom is to not only deny them their human rights, but also to impede their progress toward fulfilling their duties as productive members of society. This method of thinking is supported by the Aristotelian understanding of education. He believed that the highest Good a human being can attain is achieved through political science (Aristotle, trans. 2000). To flourish, one must be afforded the best education so that one can better understand what it is to flourish. If students are taught in environments that do not promote learning and positive relationships, then they are not able to work toward better attainment of the Good that is flourishing.

Because Aristotle believed that friendship is crucial to learning what the Good is, the socialization enabled in full inclusion classrooms is seen, by his theory, as beneficial. He would claim that the friendships developed between students, who traditionally would have been separated, are more likely to allow both parties to flourish in a society than the academic knowledge they would gain separately. Together the students can help each other better understand the Good and establish a basis for justice. By making the needs of people with disabilities more prevalent in social interactions, perhaps the institutional accommodations for them would be improved. This political influence is a strong motivation for schools to implement the full inclusion model. Politicians who encourage it are lauded for respecting the right of all students to learn with high expectations, regardless of ability, and for promoting diversity (Kohn, 1999).

Unfortunately, the very platform on which these politicians stand is unfounded. By placing all students in the single lightly structured environment of a full inclusion classroom all the time, the politicians are disrespecting the dignities of students with disabilities much more profoundly than full-inclusion theory suggests. Furthermore, they are failing to comply with the laws that govern the treatment of students with disabilities by ignoring the mandate to place students in the LRE best fitted to individual needs, and so are opposing the legal philosophy already determined how to *fairly* educate all students. It is easy to make claims about the autonomy and intrinsic

motivations of students that appeal to the free agency on which Western concepts of human nature are built. It is harder to prove that they work.

Not only have decades of research shown that full-inclusion theory is not applicable in practice, but the researcher would argue that Aristotelian flourishing relies on the objectification of students who have not yet reached the Good. The very characteristics which aid typically developing students to learn better− such as collaborative seating arrangements where students sit at tables instead of desks, brightly colored posters, unpredictable activities which spark interest, holistically designed units of study, and quickly paced lectures− often are exactly the stimuli which neurologically overwhelm students with disabilities (Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). In environments such as this, though they may be capable of interacting with their peers, it is not *fair* to them to be expected to learn in an environment which they may find overwhelming and chaotic. Many students have self-identified that they learn more in resource rooms, because the environment is quieter, and designed to fit their neurological and behavioral needs, with higher teacher interaction, so that they are better able to attend to their assignments. Yet much democratically based rhetoric in line with Aristotelian flourishing implies that in order for some individuals to reach the Good, they must help others lower on the learning spiral—that is, their peers with disabilities. Education is commonly discussed as the triumph of the individual over a difficult subject or unjust system, and in fact, if some students fail, it upholds the autonomy of those who succeed as greater than the control of an agency and ensures that students are exposed to diversity (Aristotle, trans. 2000; Epstein, 1982; Kohn, 1999; Skinner, 1953;).

If it is to be believed that education is a universal right, then the application of these Western philosophies needs to be reevaluated. Full-inclusion advocates would claim that special education settings are the exception that prevents students from learning, but the researcher proposes that no child should be excluded from learning because of environmental factors. The goal of Kant's ethics is to treat others in such a way that it can be applied universally and to respect them by aiding them toward their own ends. In line with this, every student should be provided with the accommodations needed for him to gain the skills needed to learn how to make autonomous moral decisions, with no exceptions on account of disability.

Both Kant and Aristotle's systems for ethical treatment rely upon the assumption that human nature is rational and good. The very notion of good and bad relies upon an authority's judgment. Whether that authority is supernatural or a utilitarian reaction of the best for the most within a community, it remains that good and bad are justifications for control by that authority (Mill & Bentham, 1987; Skinner, 1953;). In the twenty-first century world where globalization and scientific discovery have mitigated both supernatural and communal controls over the individual, it has become pivotal that society develops a way to understand the way humans act without a relativistic moral foundation. B.F. Skinner proposed an alternative theory of describing and explaining behavior, rather than offering reasons explaining why it cannot, or should not, be controlled. The manner in which he does so is based in reason, which should be in dialogue with Kant's philosophy, and yet Skinner expounds the public reaction to the idea that human nature is rational, and therefore predictable:

> "This possibility is offensive to many people. It is opposed to a tradition of long standing which regards man as a free agent, whose behavior is the product, not of specifiable antecedent conditions, but of spontaneous inner changes of course. Prevailing

philosophies of human nature recognize an internal "will" which has the power of interfering with causal relationships and which makes the prediction and control of behavior impossible… The alternative point of view insists upon recognizing coercive forces in human conduct which we may prefer to disregard… Regardless of how much we stand to gain from supposing that human behavior is the proper subject matter of a science, no one who is a product of Western civilization can do so without a struggle" (Skinner, 1953).

To support his claim, Skinner points to the controlling agencies seen in modern society: religions, governments, schools, and economies, even entertainments. People react in regards to the consequences of these establishments, whether they abide by laws to avoid being punished, study to earn high grades, or work long hours in order to be paid well. It is important to note that Skinner does not negate the influence of authority nor of ethical consideration on the behaviors of an individual, but rather to find a method that accounts for behavior beyond that justification. Skinner (1953) proposes that the common adherence to free agency is a reaction rooted in a desire to be released from coercive control. He suggests that laissez faire economics, democracy, religious freedom, and even progressive education movements are attempts to diversify and lessen the inevitable control everyone exerts and have exerted upon them by others. Later behaviorists Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968) submit that "a society willing to consider a technology of its own behavior apparently is likely to support that application when it deals with socially important behaviors, such as retardation, crime, mental illness, or education". In such a way, the society can enable its citizens to act with more freedom to contribute to the society in the ways it defines as right. Behaviorism, in fact, presents a whole new concept of freedom and autonomy in which it is "defined in terms of the number of options available to people and the right to exercise them" (Bandura, 1975).

Given the measures of control that certain government, economic, and social agencies exert, it is only *fair* to give more intensive support to the students who need it so that they, too, have an equitable chance at succeeding as adults. Behaviorism identifies socially significant problems and design individual programs that reflect the student's specific behaviors, environments, and motivations and to consistently apply and adapt the plan until the student has changed his response, or learned, to behave in the desired way (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1987; Epstein, 1982; Skinner, 1953). As it will be discussed later, however, "a scientific conception of human behavior dictates one practice, a philosophy of personal freedom another. Confusion in theory means confusion in practice" (Epstein, 1982).

A particularly salient social influence that may contribute to this confusion is the impact of media on social and biological tendencies. As the average household is exposed to media for over 8 hours in every day, 68% of which is through a screen (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005), many psychologists, sociologists, and other researchers are investigating the ways in which people relate to each other around the screen. One commonly studied result of the electronic culture is the lack of reciprocal relationship; when 68% of interactions are with celebrities or avatars on a screen, the complexities of negotiating with another autonomous person disappear (Pipher, 1996; Perry, 2002; Turkle, 2009; Public Broadcasting Service, 2010). Not only does the media skew the representation of life expectations, but Pipher claims they also teach children to

yield to impulses and to demand instant gratification from pain and inconvenience, as well as to become egocentric at the expense of developing a sense of community with others. Turkle (2009) furthers this claim by analyzing the impact that computers and video games have had on social and communication skills. Intimacy and conversation go hand in hand with the possibility for rejection and awkward encounters, which can now be circumvented by using technology. These shortcuts, she claim, are leading electronic societies toward intolerance of difference. Perry (2002) supports her claim by drawing attention to the decrease in voting and volunteering cataloged in recent years. Such social intolerance creates a contradictory juxtaposition of the Western ethics woven into American culture. On one hand, a world that inhibits interaction is hardly capable of engaging in the political Good that Aristotle promotes, nor can it support Kant's Categorical Imperative of allowing others to act autonomously. On the other hand, it does reinforce a strong sense of morality, supported by both philosophers. Knowing that this morality is antagonistic toward differences, teachers must consider the benefits for students with disabilities to explicitly learn behaviors to enable diverse social interactions in an increasingly hostile community. As they plan lessons, are teachers reflecting on the purposefulness of technology in the classroom and the difficulties that electronic culture creates for students outside the classroom? If the usage of technology does not benefit students to positively impact their interactions, perhaps teachers should reconsider using their time to more effectively foster skills so that their students will be able to access more opportunities for themselves.

Effective Teaching Strategies

In 1968, the federal government in the United States reviewed teaching models used across the United States to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching students from low-income and diverse backgrounds in a study called Project Follow Through. Despite the pedagogical emphasis on affective and cognitive goals, such as those upheld by progressive education advocates, the models that focused on basic skills and behaviors showed the most student success in all three evaluated areas: basic skills, cognitive skills, and affective skills (Watkins, 1988). Regardless of the data shown in Project Follow Through over forty years ago, few districts modified their curriculums to be more effective by including explicit instruction in social skills. Although this paper is not designed to describe academic strategies, there are many resources available that explicitly and systematically teach academic skills with success (What Works Clearinghouse, 2012; Kaufman, McLaughlin, Derby, & Waco, 2011; Patterson, Houchins, Jolivette, Helfin, & Fredrick, 2011; Wesier & Mathes, 2011; Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2010; Stockard & Engelmann, 2010; Vitale, Medland, & Kaniuka, 2010; Slavin, 2009; Vitale & Joseph, 2008; Stein, Kinder, Silbert, & Carnine, 2006; Shanahan, 2005; Przychodzin, Marchand-Martella, Martela, & Azim, 2004).

In 2010, Moores-Abdool found that general education teachers typically relied on reducing cognitive and reading demands as accommodations for students with IEPs, and even those subpar allowances only occurred 17.6% of the time. It is hardly *fair* to expect students to be able to succeed as adults when they are not taught strategies to interact with the world, such as choice making and social courtesies, when their teachers consider lowered academic expectations sufficient. Bender and Mathes (1995) promote a three-tiered approach to integrate these critical life skills into the classroom: unstructured, moderately structured, and structured.

Unstructured techniques include utilization of the Premack Principle, as well as a highly visible display of classroom rules and desk arrangement where the student will not be distracted, whereas moderately structured and structured techniques require the teacher to add strategies to their classroom management and sometimes cooperate with other teachers and parents. Many teachers are concerned that students with disabilities may become dependent on assistance (Heward, 2013). In order to prevent this, teachers should utilize different cues and prompts, such as picture schedules, so that students are adequately supported without becoming dependent. An additional component of explicit instruction in organizational skills should be provided so students can learn to prioritize, manage their schoolwork, and take notes independently (Archer & Gleason, 1989). Instructional prompts should be given only when necessary, and faded quickly. Actions and discipline should have naturally occurring consequences. When a child acts out, teachers should suggest what he should have done rather than tell him what not to do, and utilize interventions that offer alternative behaviors (Heward, 2013). All of these strategies will enable students to make choices and interact independently with their environments.

Carbone (2001) promotes usage of the Premack Principle by incorporating novelty and gross-motor activities in lessons that occur in purposeful and organized physical organization of the classroom. It is also recommended that teachers utilize strategies such as token economies and response cost procedures, which are intervention procedures designed to reduce "inappropriate behavior through withdrawal of specific amounts of reinforcer contingent upon the behavior's occurrence" (Alberto & Troutman, 2012; Carbone, 2001; Skinner, 1952; Iwata & Michael, 1994). Token economies can be free, based on tally marks and rewarded with activities in accordance with the Premack Principle, which fits well with the budget constraints of many inclusion classrooms (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Azrin, Vinas, & Ehle, 2007). Furthermore, the implementation of a token economy is low maintenance and does not interrupt the teacher's ability to teach and interact with other students, while still providing a necessary accommodation for students with the need for more extensive structure (Alberto & Troutman, 2012; Bender & Mathes, 1995; Carbone, 2001; McLaughlin & Williams; 1988; Salend & Duhaney, 1999;).

Some child development theories claim that effective behavioral strategies, used to support academic and social skills instruction, are bribes for students to behave in the way that is expected of them in the first place (Kohn, 1999). Such protests rely on the belief that all students are intrinsically motivated to do well in school, which is clearly not the case if one only looks at the failure, suspension, and dropout rates of the public education system. Students with disabilities are suspended at twice the rate as typically developing students every year, and since 1970 the average rate of suspension for all students has doubled (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). In 2009, 8.1% of American citizens between the ages of 16 and 24, or 3 million students, had dropped out of high school (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011). Theorists have identified the following characteristics of "discouraged learners" who ultimately do drop out: low self-confidence, task avoidance, distrust of adults, limited notion of the future, self concept as "dumb" rather than unskilled, peer relationships that are either inadequate or frowned upon by adults, impatience with routine and sitting still, and ignorance of the relationship between effort and achievement (Sagor & Cox, 2004). Ironically, these characteristics can be addressed and remedied by teaching students strategies to make choices, develop independent skills, and interact with others appropriately. Furthermore, the criticism regarding bribes falls apart if

applied to adulthood: as adults, people are expected to work diligently at an occupation for 40 hours a week. Yet adults also expect salaries and, sometimes even, benefits such as insurance and employee discounts, in exchange for the services they provide at their job (Skinner, 1953). If we strive to have students living in the Good after they have left our classrooms, and if we have identified that the obstacles that often prevent students from flourishing are social and behavioral struggles, how can we afford not to instruct our students in these areas?

Conclusions and Recommendations

Far from the progressive belief that special education settings are inferior, educators who work with students with disabilities believe that every student should be taught skills that will enable him or her to flourish as an adult in an undifferentiated world. Providing explicit instruction in life skills such as choice making, social courtesies, and on-task behavior, does not imply that students with disabilities are unequal to their typically developing peers, but rather it puts students first in considering what is best for them, irrelevant of placement and instead considering where "effective procedures and outcomes that reflect appropriate instructional practices for each child" will be (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). This individualized theory is not a case-by-case practice that has no standard, but rather operates under the belief that every child deserves to be treated relationally and with consideration of what is best for him specifically, especially if the norm detracts from his ability to access his rights. It, in fact, works with "embodied, gendered subjects who have particular histories, particular communities, particular allegiances, and particular visions of human flourishing" rather than an abstract universal rule which the natures of many behavioral and learning disabilities defy (Held, 1990).

When teachers choose to prioritize philosophies that do not benefit the students' ability to engage in the world, they violate their responsibility to support the students in ways that would allow them access to more options, indeed basic options that have deemed rights of all individuals, but it also disrespected the autonomies of the students. Kant's concept of virtue is based on will and choice: "Only a rational being had the power to act according to his conception of laws, i.e., according to principles, and thereby has he will… the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independent of inclination, recognizes as being practically necessary, i.e., as good" (Kant, 1994). If, however, this ability to rationally choose is ignored or reinterpreted by the administration, the philosophy promoted in IDEA for students with disabilities kowtows to a practice that does not support belief in *fair* treatment for all students. The theories and history influencing equitable education for students with disabilities has been evaluated, but further discussion on the subject is in order to assure that the legal requirements supported by the schools are actualized.

Jonathan Haidt (2012), a correspondent for *Time*, offered commentary about varying political interpretations of the word *fair*. He claimed that there are three types of *fair*, and the value that policymakers place on each subtype influences their actions. The first type, proportionality, is the belief that people should receive benefits from a system proportional to their contributions to it. The second type, equality, is the belief that everyone receives the same amount of services because everyone is worth the same to the system. The third type, procedural fairness, is the belief that there should be impartial rules that determine who receives what amount. Haidt

emphasizes that many philosophical differences arise because of interpretations regarding injustices within the operating system and attempts to equalize the field so that *fair* procedures apply to everyone in the same way.

In light of the societal circumstances surrounding educational philosophies and practices, it is not surprising that schools and policymakers are able to interpret provision of fair education in ways that fit their needs. The treatment of students with disabilities demonstrate that the rhetoric about intrinsic autonomy and social skills may be a philosophical excuse to place them in LREs inappropriate to their academic needs, but not so unrestrictive that they negatively impact their typically developing peers. It is only *fair* that students who will ultimately cost the government billions of dollars each year not start wasting budget funds while still in school (Center for Disease Control, 2012). It is only *fair* that all students be exposed to equal levels of socialization and curriculum. It is only *fair* that all students receive the same access to *fair* education, regardless of a diagnosis.

Considering the social intolerance of this 21st century society, the need for teacher practices— purposeful integration of technology, behavioral management, explicit social skills instruction, and consideration of ethical LRE placements— to align with philosophies which ensure that students learn as many skills to access as many options in life as possible are more crucial than ever. If schools really do believe that *all* students can learn, it is time to make the changes to uphold the educational philosophies so that *all* students are provided with the support needed to learn and engage in the world.

Acknowledgement

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