

Normativity or the Genesis of Values: On Critique/Post-critique and Educational Pragmatism

by *Stefano Oliverio*^{*}, *Matteo Santarelli*[^]

Abstract

In this paper, we will explore a possible dialogue between educational pragmatism and post-critical pedagogy (PCP) and we will ‘test’ it in reference to the question of inclusion, which is arguably one of the chief notions in contemporary educational debate. To start with, we will object to the possibly unfortunate adoption of the “normativity” vocabulary within the *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy* and we will suggest the need for a shift from the language of norms to that of values, by building on Hans Joas’ distinction between norms and values. While norms have to do with obligation and the limitation of possibilities of action, values are characterized by an ideal and inspirational function. In keeping with Joas’ distinction, we will argue that the notion of normativity may risk being accomplice with the excessive role of normative critique decried by post-critical approaches.

Against this backdrop, we will zoom in on the question of inclusion. We will indicate two possible outlooks: a critical pragmatist view of inclusion, as exemplified in some insights of José Medina, and a post-critical understanding, which we will outline in reference to Joas but also – via him – to the classics of educational pragmatism. We will finally suggest that the relationships between critique and post-critique should be construed in terms of a quasi-Bohrian complementarity and that pragmatism qua a “corridor theory,” as Papini famously put it, can help us to orchestrate this complex regime of relationships.

Keywords: Post-critical pedagogy; values; norms; educational pragmatism.

First submission: 15/10/2024, accepted: 27/11/2024

^{*} University of Naples Federico II, Italy.

[^] Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, Italy.

Pragmatism and/as a non-affirmative theory of education?

The idea that education must be a major vehicle to promote social justice belongs to the «conventional wisdom» (Cremin, 1961, p. 328)¹ of a large part of the contemporary democratic-progressive discourse and, thus, it is taken for granted as if the question revolved only around the identification of the most adequate strategies in order to achieve this goal.

While the latter is highly desirable in socio-political terms, it is debatable, at a philosophical-educational level, if this attitude genuinely describes the task of education qua education. Enlisting education for the enforcement of social justice is an example of what is called, in the German debate, the “affirmative theory of education,” namely a kind of theorizing that is

based on an instrumental concept of educational practice and view[s] it as an important means for either the transmission or the alteration of given actualities. Not as producers of the respective actuality are the educational interactants viewed, but rather as actual or potential bearers of desirable qualities. [...] *[Affirmative theories] recognize the ‘educational’ aspect, [...], only as the ‘execution’ of non-educational demands on educational practice.* (Benner, 2015, p. 147. Emphasis added)

Affirmative theories of education can take on different guises but in modernity the stress has been laid on social issues. Indeed, the educationalization of social problems has been a fundamental ingredient of the modern educational project (Fendler, 2018; Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008) and one of the reasons for its pivotal importance:

Education is perhaps the greatest institutional success of the modern era. It grew from a modest and marginal position in the eighteenth century to the center of modern societies in the twenty-first, where it consumes an enormous share of the time and treasure of both states and citizens. Key to its institutional success has been its facility at educationalization – its ability to embrace and embody the social reform missions that have been imposed upon it. (Labaree, 2008, pp. 447-448)²

¹ Lawrence Cremin refers this phrase not to social justice but rather to the progressive educational discourse dominant up to the 1950s.

² The success to which Labaree refers is the fact that education has been invoked as the chief resource to tackle social problems. This does not entail that education is successful in performing this task. Indeed, quite the contrary has often been the case. One of the foci of Labaree’s (2008) argument is precisely the endeavour to explain the «puzzling paradox» of a permanent faith in education despite its failures as a «mechanism for solving [social] problems» (p. 447).

In contrast with this stance, according to Benner a genuinely educational theory of education should be non-affirmative; this implies

[t]he suspension of any affirmative education, that is, the fundamental renunciation of placing education as a directly affirming or negating instance in the service of non-educational actualities. [...] A non-affirmative theory of education differs from affirmative educational conceptions in that it does not conceptualize pedagogical influences as either intentional or functional interventions. Instead, it problematizes the intentionality of educational action on the basis of the principle of the summoning to self-activity [*Aufforderung zur Selbsttätigkeit*] and it challenges the functionality of societal influences under the idea of their pedagogical transformation. (Benner, 2015, pp. 147 and 148)

On the same wavelength does also post-critical pedagogy (PCP henceforth) move when vindicating the «autotelic» character of education (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017, p. 18) and appealing to «education for education's sake» (p. 17). Far from being the expression of social irresponsibility, PCP should be read as a radically non-affirmative (in Benner's acceptance³) theory of education.

However, there is a more specific element within it: deploying a conceptuality drawn from Hannah Arendt (2006) and her distinction of education as a specific domain, not to be conflated with that of politics (or the household, for that matter), PCP imputes to critical pedagogy (whether in Bourdieusian, Foucauldian, neo-Marxist or whatever cloak) the fact of confusing education and politics, thereby instrumentalizing the former, that is, turning it into a tool to realize agendas established by the latter.

In contrast, in the outlook of PCP the respective logics of education and politics should be clearly distinguished: the former is ruled by what Arendt calls "love of the world" and its task is the passing on of what is valuable in the world to the new generation, so that the latter can start anew with the world; politics, instead, is animated, especially in its critical inflection, by the "hatred of the world," understood as the focalization on what is unjust and disempowering and, thus, needs to be changed in order to promote more advanced social arrangements (Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2020).

Against this backdrop, in the present article we would like to introduce the pragmatist perspective into this conversation. On the one hand, pragmatism – with the intimate bond that it postulates between democracy

³ We specify "Benner's acceptance" because this same adjective (= affirmative) is chosen by PCP to indicate a stance that affirms the love of the world, in opposition to the "negative" attitude, which connotes, instead, the critical mood. Thus, in this inflection, affirmative education – as distinct from critical (= negative) pedagogy – is what PCP endorses in the name of the principle "education for education's sake."

and education – could appear as an unlikely candidate as a non-affirmative theory of education. Indeed, even the very titles of the works of Dewey seem to deny this possibility: whether emphasizing the relationship of *School and Society* or understanding education as “a necessity of life” and “a social function” – to mention the titles of the first two chapters of *Democracy and Education* –, educational pragmatism seems to be alien to any “autotelic” view of education. And yet, without intimating any complete overlapping with Benner’s or PCP’s stances, one should not forget the powerful vindication of the autonomy of education in which Dewey’s *The Sources of a Science of Education* culminates:

This matter opens up the field of educational values and objectives. How are they to be determined? From what are they derived? The assumption that gives rise to the procedures just criticized is the belief that social conditions determine educational objectives. This is a fallacy. Education is autonomous and should be free to determine its own ends, its own objectives. *To go outside the educational function and to borrow objectives from an external source is to surrender the educational cause.* (Dewey, 1984, p. 38. Emphasis added)

We should not too hastily translate the stance emerging in this quotation in terms of PCP’s “autotelism,” without taking into consideration also the specific idea of the means-ends continuum that is pivotal in Dewey’s conceptual device. Despite this caveat, establishing a dialogue with non-affirmative theories of education can lead us to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of educational pragmatism, without making it merely a major manifestation of the educationalization of social problems.

In the same vein, the exploration of a pragmatist take on post-critique is not too frequent (but see Oliverio, 2019, Oliverio, 2020; Thoilliez, 2019; Wortmann, 2019) and also the proponents of PCP seem not to consider pragmatism as a dialogue partner; and yet, this dialogue could be profitable both in order to release some potentialities in the pragmatist outlook and to enrich the post-critical endeavour.

Our argumentation will unfold in two steps. First, we will contest that the vocabulary of “normativity,” which the founding text of PCP adopts, is adequate for a post-critical attitude and we will argue that normativity is better aligned with a critical stance, whereas post-critique should draw on the vocabulary of values. We will take this distinction (norms $\neq$ values) in the inflection that Joas (2000, pp. 174-186) has given to it, by insightfully reactivating some potentialities of the classic pragmatist conceptuality, and we will indicate how it may be deployed in a dialogue with post-critique. In this wake, secondly, we will illustrate the different domains of pertinence (as we may call them) of critique and post-critique by engaging with an

important contribution to a pragmatist pedagogy of inclusion, José Medina's (2014) idea of a "pedagogy of perplexity and discomfort." In particular, we will suggest that Medina ultimately assumes a critical stance and, accordingly, he deploys what PCP would define as a "hermeneutical pedagogy"; moreover, we will argue that this stance may and perhaps should be complemented with a post-critical attitude and, thus, with what PCP dubs as a «pedagogical hermeneutics» (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017, p. 16). We will finally suggest that the regime of relationships between critique and post-critique should be construed in terms of a quasi-Bohrian complementarity in order not to ensnare the critique/post-critique discussion in an unending and unhelpful controversy-game, in particular when the question of the "social relevance" of education is at stake.

Norms and/or values?

The *Manifesto for a Post-critical Pedagogy* (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017) is the text that has introduced the theme of post-critique – widely discussed in literary theory and social and political philosophy over the last decade – also into the debates of educational theory and philosophy (see Oliverio & Thoilliez, 2024). We have already hinted at two pivotal ideas of PCP, viz. the vindication of the autotelic character of education and the emphasis on the notion of the love of the world as quintessential to the educational endeavour. It is to note that these ideas are presented as "principles" and, more specifically, the *Manifesto* emphasizes the need for «a shift from **procedural normativity to principled normativity**» (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017, p. 15. Bold in the original).

To set the coordinates of our engagement with PCP via a pragmatist lens, we will take our cue precisely from the choice of the authors of the *Manifesto* to marshal the vocabulary of "normativity" and, in contrast, we would like to suggest the hypothesis that one of the fault lines between a critical and a post-critical stance lies precisely in the stress upon the (change of) the norms (critique) or rather in a stress on values (post-critique). To flesh out this interpretive hypothesis we will draw on some tenets of Hans Joas (2000), who has provided the most detailed account of a pragmatist theory of values and of the difference between the dimension of values and that of norms.

Joas' definition of values is twofold. First, he defines values as the outcome of the articulation of experiences of self-formation and self-transcendence. By affirming the tight connection between values and experiences, Joas does not mean claiming that values flow directly and immediately from these experiences. Rather, they are the result of a process

of articulation. Placing articulation practices at the centre of the definition of values has two far-reaching consequences for our understanding of values. Firstly, value articulation is a relatively creative process. These experiences can be articulated in different ways, but not arbitrarily in all possible ways. The contingency of these experiences and the contingencies linked to the particular cultural tools that enable articulation should not be confused with total plasticity and indeterminacy – this is why we think vagueness is a better term here. If this vagueness did not exist, there would be no logical and pragmatic space for articulation (cf. Taylor, 1985; Viola, 2019, Serrano Zamora & Santarelli, 2021). If there were total indeterminacy, we would be talking about creation, not articulation. Secondly, articulation has a feedback effect on both our affective and conceptual relationships with values. Articulation does not mean translating and betraying the ineffability of experience with words and language. Articulation means developing experience from within.

The importance of articulation processes emerges also in a second definition provided by Joas. In a 2008 essay, Joas defines values as an «emotionally laden notion of that which is desirable» (p. 4). Values therefore have a conceptual dimension, a conceptual dimension, and this conceptual dimension of values can be the subject of disagreements, conflicts and partial negotiations, alongside a more general agreement that what is being discussed is a shared value (Santarelli, 2024).

Moving from this understanding of values, Joas sees values and norms as representing two different dimensions of human action and experience. Values are affectively laden conceptions of what is desirable, and therefore they represent *the attractive and inspirational dimension of human action and experience*. It is not just that we believe that a specific value is good. We are attracted and inspired by values we believe in. On the contrary, norms have to do with the restrictive and obligational dimension of human experience. We follow a norm and we believe it is right even if we do not feel any attraction towards it. And conversely, no norm can force us to believe that something – a specific person, an ideal, a group – is a value.

To give an example: the local government of our city is introducing many strict decorum rules. They are doing this because they want to promote the image of a clean, efficient city and they want their citizens to be proud of their clean and efficient city. Therefore, these measures are justified on the basis of local pride and identity. We might follow the new rules meticulously, and even believe that the new rules function well, without caring at all about local pride and identity. And, most importantly, no norms and no rules can automatically push us to believe in a specific value. The local government might organize initiatives in the public sphere and in schools to “educate”

people for local pride and identity. Yet, there is no automatic translation of norms into values, or *vice versa*. This understanding of values is clearly inspired by pragmatism: as we will see in the next paragraphs, William James and John Dewey are the main references in this regard.

It might obviously happen that norms are introduced to articulate and instantiate values in everyday social life. This takes place also in the case of the value of inclusion. Some individuals and social groups are not satisfied with the ongoing abstract references to the importance of “inclusion,” if these references are not accompanied by concrete measures (we will expatiate more on inclusion in the next section). Therefore, they might ask for an implementation of this abstract value through norms and procedures. In that case, norms are a pragmatic implementation of values (as theorized by Talcott Parsons), and their existence is justified through a reference to values (Heinich, 2017). It can also happen that obligations derive from values. If a specific person is an important value to me, then of course some obligations derive from the acknowledgment of this value. Yet, in both cases, we are referring to specific situations. What Joas’ theory denies is the fact that norms are by definition pragmatic implementations of values and that norms must always be justified by referring to values.

As aforementioned, Joas’ idea of the relative independence between values and norms is inspired by classic pragmatism. Especially important in this regard is James’ distinction between religiousness and morality: morality operates in the direction of the limitation of our action, insofar as it forbids some goals or inhibits some tools in the name of given rules; religiousness, instead, widens our possibilities of action, insofar as it points to new existential horizons, impassions us with new ways of life and educates us for new forms of feeling. Particularly revealing is James’ description of the “faith-state” that has both a cognitive and an affective side. As Joas appropriately remarks, this distinction must not be crystalized in a stark separation and, moreover, James does not overrate the importance of the merely cognitive side (which would be conducive to a reviviscence of Cartesian attitudes). When addressing the affective dimension, James (1982) prefers to spell out the faith-state as a «state of assurance» (p. 247), which presents some characteristic features:

The central one is the loss of all the worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the *willingness to be*, even though the outer conditions should remain the same. [...] The second feature is the sense of perceiving truth not known before. [...] A third peculiarity of the assurance state is the objective change which the world often appears to undergo. ‘An appearance of newness beautifies every object’ [...]. (p. 248)

We want to recontextualize these annotations within a possible dialogue between pragmatism and PCP: a description like James' may be read as an instantiation of the love of the world, which is able to detect and concentrate on what is valuable and, therefore, worthy of being passed on to the new generation – this being the core of the educational undertaking as understood via Arendt. The phrase about the “beautification” of objects with “an appearance of newness” may be a forceful Jamesian redescription of what happens when ‘something’ becomes a matter of study within the school qua *skholé* as presented by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (2013):

These are the rather rare but always magical moments when students and teachers are carried away by the subject matter, which, simply in being said, seems to take on a voice of its own. This means, firstly, that society is kept in some way outside – the classroom door shuts and the teacher calls for silence and attention. But secondly [...] [s]tudents are drawn from their world and made to enter a new one. Thus, on one side of the coin there is a suspension, that is, a rendering inoperable, a liberation. On the other, there is a positive movement: the school as present tense and middle ground, a place and time for possibilities and freedom. (p. 38)

One could be disturbed by the introduction of a religious vocabulary and, moreover, find this contradictory when referred to the idea of the study within *skholé* that Masschelein and Simons depict rather in terms of a “profanation,” construed as the act through which «something [...] is detached from regular use, no longer sacred or occupied by a specific meaning [...]. It is something, in this general (non-religious) sense, that has defiled or expropriated; in other words, something that has become public» (*Ibidem*). However, we must insist on the fact that we are appropriating James' tenets via Joas and, thus, religiousness refers here to that dimension of human activity which is inspirational, viz. «attractive, empowering, and motivating» (Joas, 2000, p. 66), and is intimately linked with the experience of the genesis of values as distinct from the compliance with norms.

Similarly, the gap between Masschelein and Simons' emphasis on the “becoming public” and the seemingly all too private character of the faith-state does not need to be overstated: the beautification of the object with an appearance of newness should not be taken as a segregated, merely internal or even ‘quasi-hallucinated’ experience but as a way to describe the first-person resonance of an experience – that of the genesis of values – which may be genuinely collective. This is all the more true in educational settings, insofar as, with an inflection of some PCP's motifs, we conceive of education in terms of the gathering around a thing that matters, in order to study it together; thereby a new collective of students – in the original participial acceptance of the word (students = those who study) and, thus, including

among them also teachers – emerges. From this perspective, we find once again an interweaving of the personal resonance and a collective experience.

As James (1982, p. 72) compares the faith-state with the being in love and with how this changes our own perception and existence in the world, we can connect this condition with Vlieghe and Zamojski's (2019) stress upon what they dub *educational love* as the chief element of the ontology of teaching qua thing-centred:

[W]hen acknowledged, love for a thing involves the necessity of sharing this love with others, and especially with the new generation. Saying 'yes' to one's love for a thing means that one recognizes that one cannot imagine living without studying this thing, and hence, one cannot possibly tolerate that the new generation remains deprived of a chance to study this thing, and that there would be no opportunity for this thing to be renewed by the new generation. (p. 36)

A cross-reading of James and PCP could grant new vistas both in terms of a 'pragmatist' take on PCP and of an enrichment of the Jamesian understanding of teaching. This is not, however, the main trajectory in the present argumentation: we are interested in pinpointing that, via James, Joas recontextualizes the classic distinction between the good and the right, viz. the desirable/valuable and the normative: the former is what enlarges our experience, opens up the self, by avoiding its encapsulation into given customs (morally positive as they may be in other respects) and contributes to a movement of self-transcendence, which is not the transcendence towards a different realm but rather a radical reorientation of our existence, thanks to which we look at the world with new eyes (and new I's, we can add with a pun); the latter is what defines the confines of legitimacy of our action, identifies what is due and obligatory in specific contexts and ensures the adequacy of our conduct in the light of received standards or rules.

From this perspective, the vocabulary of normativity – introduced in the *Manifesto* – risks betraying the deepest motif of a post-critical stance as distinct from a critical one. Indeed, the normative, as understood via Joas, is the «restrictive-obligatory» (Joas, 2000, p. 184) dimension of our action, what delimitates its range of appropriateness and helps us to identify the "right" thing to do. Far from being suitable for post-critique the vocabulary of normativity seems more aligned with that of critique: indeed, critique may be read also (if not fundamentally) as a contestation of given norms, by debunking their alleged neutrality and disclosing their hidden linkages with a state of privilege and dominion, as we will suggest in the next section.

We have already inflected James' individualistic picture towards a social dimension but it is the Dewey of *A Common Faith* that Joas draws on in order to fine-tune his pragmatist view of the genesis of values. While James'

insights into the genesis of values are momentous and deeply inspiring, they seem to be confined to the realm of extraordinary individual experiences of self-transcendence. They thus leave unexplored both the dynamics of the cultural articulation of these experiences into new values and the possibility of an intersubjective source of experiences of self-transcendence. Far from being limited to the realm of religion and faith, Dewey's arguments in his 1934 essay, *A Common Faith*, contribute to the clarification of these topical questions about the genesis of values.

From his perspective, ideals and values appear as the result of a creative process of idealizing contingent possibilities. The genesis of values involves a complex mixture of contingency and agency. The experience of contingent possibilities is an unexpected event that is beyond our conscious and deliberate control. We cannot simply choose to have or produce these experiences. However, human agency plays a role in the way in which these experiences and possibilities are creatively idealized and articulated in the form of values and ideals. Both at the level of experience and at the level of its articulation, the intersubjective dimension plays a role. The opening up of contingent possibilities and experiences of self-transcendence is by no means an exclusive prerogative of the individual. Rather, it can be achieved through processes of dialogue and communication. Moreover, intersubjective dialogue and communication also play a role in transforming these possibilities and experiences into shared ideals and values. The key role of intersubjective processes in no way downplays the close link between values and the self. From Dewey's perspective, the self is constitutively structured around the internalization of intersubjective relations. Therefore, the genesis and establishment of values produce a reorientation and unification of the whole personality.

In conclusion, Joas' pragmatist account of values grants an alternative perspective to the account of normativity implicitly endorsed by the founding text of PCP. This perspective emphasizes the complex coexistence of spontaneity and agency, of intersubjective and self-related processes, of experience and practice. Given their inspirational and captivating nature, and the contingent character of their emergence, values cannot be the subject of obligations.

Pedagogy of discomfort and/or pedagogy of self-opening?

In this section we are going to illustrate and further expand on the cluster of ideas introduced previously in reference to a specific notion, that of inclusion, which is arguably one of the, if not *the*, catchword(s) of a large

part of contemporary educational debate, especially when the social function of education is in the spotlight. As indicated above, we will develop our argumentation by dialoguing with the proposal of an ethics and pedagogy of discomfort, which José Medina (2014) delineates by elaborating on important ideas of Jane Addams. Medina's reflections can help us to start outlining a possible 'post-critical' pragmatist view of inclusion precisely because he, instead, tends to inflect pragmatism in a critical direction.

We will take our cue from a key theme of the pragmatist tradition, that of social sympathy. While it is present also in Dewey and James, Jane Addams has offered one of the most perceptive views of it. Throughout her work, she insisted on the importance of sympathetic knowledge in democratic and social life. Two points are worth noting here. First, Addams (2002) distinguishes between individual and social sympathy. Individual sympathy is based on the way in which a specific sympathizing subject represents the person who is the object of sympathy. This means that the person is the object of sympathy on the condition that she fits into the representation of the sympathizing person. As long as she exceeds this initial representation, she will not deserve sympathy anymore and will often stir up resented reactions. This is the reason why individual sympathy is often tainted by paternalism, sexism and classism. Workers lose the sympathy of their boss who treats them "as family," as soon as they start advancing their own economic claims. Daughters lose the family's support and love as soon as their desires and needs exceed the domain of family claims. Migrants start losing compassion and pity when they start acting as social actors provided with their own agency and interests, rather than merely as unfortunate victims of fate.

Therefore, Addams' main problem is not that people are merely self-interested and selfish, and that they do not care about the others. The problem is that they care about the others from an individual standpoint, i.e. from the standpoint of their personal and fixed understanding of what the others are and should be. To overcome these issues, it is necessary to move towards a socially framed ethics and to engage in social sympathetic knowledge. Social sympathetic knowledge involves at least three fundamental and deeply interrelated aspects. First, it is fallible. Adopting the standpoint of social sympathetic knowledge involves being open to the fact that our immediate sympathetic feelings are deeply seated in our implicit or explicit understanding of the others. This means that according to this understanding we might fail in sympathizing with someone who deserves our sympathy, and that we may immediately tend to have sympathetic feelings with people who deserve our reproach.

Secondly, sympathetic knowledge is social as long as it is open to the self-understanding and the self-determination of other people. This means that

other people are not merely the passive addressees of sympathy. Rather, the social character of sympathetic knowledge depends on the fact that we are open to the fact that our representations of other people can and often should be corrected through our relationship with them.

Thirdly, social sympathetic knowledge has a cognitive content. It is a source of social and moral knowledge of ourselves, of the others, and of society.

As Charlene Haddock Siegfried aptly points out, sympathy has necessarily to do with the capacity of dealing with perplexity, i.e. something that refers to “someone’s personal involvement in a situation that baffles and confuses her, because her usual understanding and responses are inadequate to explain or transform a troubling situation” (Siegfried, 2002, pp. xxv-xxvi). Rephrased in Dewey’s term, social sympathetic knowledge implies the capacity of accepting and dealing with problematic situations.

It is precisely this pivotal role of perplexity that Medina most emphasizes in his endeavour to outline a pragmatist pedagogy of inclusion. It is worth quoting him at a certain length:

The cultivation of perplexity that Addams recommends is the cultivation of our openness to being challenged and affected by other experiential perspectives. This critical experiential approach involves an ethical imperative: the imperative to renew our perplexities and to reinvigorate our openness to alternative standpoints, the imperative to constantly expand our personal as well as shared perspectives and sensibilities. Only when we live up to such imperative can we contribute to the formation of pluralistic communities and open publics that are committed to inclusion and social justice. The expansion of social sensibilities through the cultivation of perplexity facilitates pluralistic forms of *solidarity*. (Medina, 2014, p. 55).

The educational dividends of this approach are immediately thematized:

We are interested in the cultivation of *perplexity* and in educational practices and habits that resist *comfort* because they are the heart and soul of solidarity, of social empathy and a social ethics. It is in and through discomfort (i.e. through the disruption of the familiar and taken for granted) that we discover new possibilities of social relationality by paying attention to new forms of social identification. [...] The *ethics and pedagogy of discomfort* offers a more complex path for our cognitive-affective and socio-political melioration. Through practices of perplexity and discomfort (or resisting comfort) we can learn to go beyond the strictures of inherited cognitive and affective habits, and we can learn to envision new cognitive-affective attitudes and orientations toward others. (*Ibidem*)

What is most significant is *how* Medina develops the idea of a pedagogy of perplexity and discomfort, by construing it as a «fighting [against]

insensitivity» (p. 56). He understands insensitivity «in terms of blindness or numbness to the perspectives of others and their experiences. Thus, for example, racial insensitivity involves being numbed to racial problems and blind to the perspectives of racial others; and gender insensitivity involves being oblivious to, ignorant of, and in general not attuned to the experiences and problems of people differently gendered» (p. 57). Accordingly, the main focus of Medina's pedagogical proposal is that of creating educational situations which unearth those cognitive and epistemic dysfunctions and affective defence mechanisms that produce this kind of numbness and prevent people from even being conscious of them.

In the terminology of PCP, Medina's stance instantiates a *hermeneutical pedagogy* that aims at smoking out the «cognitive and affective obstacles that contribute to making people socially numbed to injustices [... and the] blindspots that result both in social ignorance and in self-ignorance» (*Ibidem*). Thereby, the pragmatist pedagogy of Medina is first and foremost critical and, as a matter of fact, he re-reads Addams and Dewey's views about social sympathy in the light of the «Queer Theory, Feminist Standpoint Theory, and Critical Race Theory [that] teach us the importance of unmasking and undoing the process of social construction of our perspective, of interrupting the flow of familiarity and obviousness, making the familiar unfamiliar and the obvious bizarre» (p. 64).

It is a move that grants powerful insights into how to operate within educational settings in order to further inclusion by expanding sympathy and sympathetic knowledge and affection. By harping on Addamsian motifs, Medina conceives of this fight against insensitivity in terms of a rethinking of values but one can wonder whether his is not ultimately, instead, a work in a normative direction, to stick to the vocabulary introduced in the previous section. We are not taking the term "norms" in its strictest meaning nor do we want to insinuate that Medina envisions only what Joas would call the "restrictive" dimension of action. And yet, the pedagogy of discomfort, focusing on a work of negation, viz. of overcoming (of biases, obstacles etc.), does not seem to really instantiate that "attractive" and "inspirational" tension which belongs to the value-dimension.

To capture it in a formula, we can say that Medina's critical-pragmatist pedagogy of discomfort and perplexity performs a *self-disclosure* (= an unveiling – and, then, removing – of one's mechanisms of resistance to sympathy), whereas a post-critical pragmatist pedagogy should rather operate in the sense of a *self-opening* as predicated upon the faith/assurance in the possibilities of the expansion of human sympathetic interactions.

The distinction between self-disclosure and self-opening is as slight and decisive as that between hermeneutical pedagogy and what PCP calls “pedagogical hermeneutics” when arguing that

[i]t is precisely the challenges of living together in a common world that constitute the hope that make education continue to seem a worthwhile activity. Hermeneutics isn’t a (unsolvable) problem, but rather something educators need to create. We shouldn’t speak and act on the basis of a priori assumptions about the (im)possibility of real mutual understanding and respect, but rather show that, in spite of the many differences that divide us, there is a space of commonality that only comes about a posteriori. (Hodgson, Vlieghe & Zamojski, 2017, p. 16)

We would suggest redescribing this idea of PCP in the Deweyan terms of the miracle of communication, as Joas has valorized it qua the constantly renewed event of the overcoming of “self-centredness” and the experience of «the radical readiness to let oneself be shaken by the Other in order thereby to realize oneself with and through other people: as shattering intersubjectivity» (Joas 2000, p. 117).

Reading the Addamsian perplexity through the lens of Joas’ “shattering intersubjectivity” instead of through the critical stance of the fight against insensitivity is, in our interpretive proposal, a way to give it a post-critical spin: the focus is not so much on the dysfunctions to correct, on the defence mechanisms to dismantle and on the cognitive barriers to tear down as on a global re-orientation of the whole person. To marshal the Dewey of *A Common Faith* (on which Joas builds) we have to do with «a change of will conceived as the organic plenitude of our being, rather than any special change in will» (Dewey, 1986, p. 17). The whole person is not a natural datum, the internal, finally perceivable core of our self; as Joas aptly remarks, we have an imaginary relation to it in the sense that it emerges when the genesis of values, that creative process of idealization of contingent possibilities, takes place, that is,

when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action. [...] The idealizing imagination seizes upon the most precious things found in the climacteric moments of experience and projects them. We need no external criterion and guarantee for their goodness. They are had, they exist as good, and out of them we frame our ideal ends (p. 33).

The whole person is our person insofar s/he experiences a thorough re-orientation of her/his relation with the world and is granted coherence through a «sense of values which carry one through periods of darkness and despair to such an extent that they lose their usual depressive character» (p.

11). We have to do with a sort of Deweyan faith-state «as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices» (p. 23).

We should not misconstrue this post-critical reappropriation as a reconciled or comfortably peaceful process: the element of perplexity which lies at the very core of the Addamsian sympathy remains in the experience of a shattering intersubjectivity, something that baffles and confuses us. However, to deploy once again the terminology of PCP, instead of the negative-critical attitude which is on the lookout for what obstructs inter-human understanding (= hermeneutical pedagogy), the focus is here on the process of the formation of a broader and more unified self in connection with the imaginative relation to inclusive ideals that make real the possibility of mutual understanding and respect (= pedagogical hermeneutics).

PCP would call this an affirmative attitude but it does not lead to any affirmative theory of education in Benner's acceptance of the word. We can say that the danger of the latter is more present in conceptual devices like Medina's that may risk subordinating the educational agenda to other discourses insofar as education could be instrumentalized as ultimately a fight against some social ills. In the post-critical alternative view of inclusion that we have started outlining, the endeavour is, instead, first and foremost formative-educational insofar as it concerns the trans-formation of the self as a whole in its interaction with the world and, thus, the political implications of this undertaking – which are anything but absent – are indirectly attained rather than being in the forefront of the educational design.

The issue is not whether the critical or the post-critical approach is the most recommended when addressing the question of inclusion and social justice. Indeed, as argued elsewhere (Oliverio & Thoilliez, 2024), we should think of the relation of critique and post-critique in educational theory and philosophy (especially when coming to the meaning of education for society) in terms of a quasi-Bohrian complementarity in which each perspective offers an exhaustive picture of the phenomenon but these outlooks cannot be deployed at the same time. The combination of the mutual exclusivity and of the necessity of both perspectives in order to have a complete description of the phenomenon may be rooted, at least in our tradition, in the very insurgence of the Western educational project through a “philosophical-educational big-bang” (Oliverio, 2018). It is precisely the need for a co-existence of these two views that may be one more reason to include pragmatism in the conversation to the extent that it is a «corridor theory,» as Papini (1961, p. 405) famously put it, and can help us to orchestrate this complex regime of relationships within educational practices.

References

- Addams, J. (2002). *Democracy and Social Ethics*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Arendt, H. (2006). Crisis in education. In H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. London: Penguin books.
- Benner, D. (2015). *Allgemeine Pädagogik. Eine systematisch-problemgeschichtliche Einführung in die Grundstruktur pädagogischen Denkens und Handelns*. Weinheim und München: BELTZ Juventa.
- Cremin, L.A. (1961). *The Transformation of the School. Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Dewey, J. (1984). The Sources of a Science of Education. In J.A. Boydston (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey: vol. 5: 1929-1930* (pp. 1-40). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1986). A Common Faith. In J.A. Boydston (ed.), *The Later Works of John Dewey: vol. 9: 1933-1934* (pp. 1-58). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Fendler, L. (2018). Educationalization. In P. Smeyers (ed.), *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (pp. 1169-1184). Cham: Springer.
- Heinich, N. (2017). *Des valeurs. Un approche sociologique*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Hodgson, N., Vlieghe, J., & Zamojski, P. (2017). *Manifesto for a post-critical pedagogy*. Santa Barbara (CA): punctum books.
- James, W. (1982) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Penguin Classics.
- Joas, H. (2000). *The Genesis of Values*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Joas, H. (2008). The Cultural Values of Europe: An Introduction. In H. Joas & K. Wiegandt (eds.), *The Cultural Values of Europe* (pp. 1-21). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Labaree, D.F. (2008). The Winning Ways of a Losing Strategy: Educationalizing Social Problems in the United States. *Educational Theory*, 58(4), pp. 447-460. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-5446.2008.00299.x.
- Masschelein, J., & Simons, M. (2013). *In Defense of the School. A Public Issue*. Leuven: E-ducation, Culture & Society Publishers.
- Medina, J. (2014). Towards An Ethics and Pedagogy of Discomfort: Insensitivity, Perplexity, and Education as Inclusion. *Civitas Educationis. Education, Politics and Culture*, 3(1), pp. 51-67.
- Oliverio, S. (2018). The Philosophical and Educational Big Bang. An Aristophanic-Deweyan Archaeology. In N. Levinson (ed.), *Philosophy of Education Society Yearbook 2016* (pp. 362-371). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
- Oliverio, S. (2019). An Edifying Philosophy of Education? Starting a Conversation between Rorty and Post-critical Pedagogy. *Ethics & Education*, 14(4), pp. 482-496. DOI: 10.1080/17449642.2019.1669311.
- Oliverio, S. (2020). The Question of a Thing-Centred View of Education: Notes on Vlieghe and Zamojski's *Towards an Ontology of Teaching*. *Studies in*

- Philosophy and Education*, 39(1), pp. 103-107. DOI: 10.1007/s11217-019-09693-w.
- Oliverio, S., & Thoilliez, B. (2024). Post-Critical Pedagogy: A Philosophical and Epistemological Identikit. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 58(6), pp. 1029-1045. DOI: 10.1093/jopedu/qhae076.
- Papini, G. (1961). Pragmatismo. In G. Papini, *Filosofia e letteratura* (pp. 329-468). Milano: Arnaldo Mondadori Editore.
- Santarelli, M. (2024). Improving Concepts, Reshaping Values: Pragmatism and Ameliorative Projects. *Inquiry*, 67(3), pp. 872-890. DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2022.2095300.
- Seigfried, C.H. (2002). Introduction. In J. Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (pp. ix-xxxviii). Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Serrano Zamora, J., & Santarelli, M. (2021). Populism or Pragmatism? Two Ways of Understanding Political Articulation. *Constellations*, 28(4), pp. 496-510. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8675.12522.
- Smeyers, P., & Depaepe, M. (eds.) (2008). *Educational Research: The Educationalization of Social Problems*. Cham: Springer.
- Taylor, C. (1985). *Philosophical Papers, vol. 1: Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thoilliez, B. (2019). Hope and Education beyond Critique. Towards Pedagogy with a Lower Case 'p'. *Ethics & Education*, 14(4), pp. 453-466. DOI: 10.1080/17449642.2019.1669379.
- Viola, T. (2019). From Vague Symbols to Contested Concepts: Peirce, W.B. Gallie, and History. *History and Theory*, 58(2), pp. 233-251. DOI: 10.1111/hith.12111.
- Vlieghe, J., & Zamojski, P. (2019). *Towards an Ontology of Teaching: Thing-centred Pedagogy, Affirmation and Love for the World*. Cham: Springer
- Vlieghe, J., & Zamojski, P. (2020). Redefining Education and Politics: On the Paradoxical Relation between Two Separate Spheres. *Policy Futures in Education*, 18(7), pp. 864-877. DOI: 10.1177/1478210320943808.
- Wortmann, K. (2019). 'Post-critical Pedagogy as Poetic Practice: Combining Affirmative and Critical Vocabularies'. *Ethics and Education*, 14(4), pp. 467-81. DOI: 10.1080/17449642.2019.1669942.