Supporting Learners' Uncertainty: Teaching through Dialogue and Moral Development

Andrea English, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada, andrea.english.edu@gmail.com

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Abstract

In this paper, I develop a theory of the connection between teaching through dialogue and the moral development of learners in classrooms. This paper is situated in the context of international discourse on educational policy which underscores that testing and high-stakes accountability policies hinder moral learning in the classroom. While dialogue has been considered an important notion in contemporary research on education and social justice, the various aspects of this field of inquiry still remain fragmented. My paper brings together diverse strands of international theoretical and empirical research on dialogue in the fields of educational philosophy, moral psychology, and feminist ethics. Specifically, drawing primarily on the work of John Dewey, Martha Nussbaum, Nel Noddings and empirical research in moral psychology, I develop the connection between three concepts: moral learning, critical thinking, and dialogic teaching. In this discussion, I highlight the role of uncertainty in moral learning. I demonstrate that dialogue as a pedagogical approach in indispensable to supporting learner’s engagement with their own uncertainty about norms and values. This engagement with uncertainty serves to help learners form an open, pluralist, empathetic worldview. The paper aims to provide a critical lens for observation in classrooms to determine whether teaching is supporting social and moral learning.

References


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