The concepts of 'educational process' and 'educated person' from the philosophical perspective of Richard Stanley Peters: Critical review

Mulugeta Yayeh Worku (Ph.D.) iD

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, College of Education, Bahir Dar University

Abstract

This article aimed to examine the two concepts of the educational process and educated person from the philosophical perspective of Richard S. Peters, a prominent philosopher of education. In light of this, one of his influential works, "What is an Educational Process?", was carefully reviewed. Some comments on the overall relevance of Peters' positions on the two concepts are also included. The review provides valuable insights into these concepts, which are profoundly important for the education field. Finally, concluding remarks and implications of the author's perspectives on contemporary educational systems are highlighted.

Introduction

Philosophers have long grappled with the complex nature of education. Despite their efforts, defining education, clarifying its processes, and, most importantly, identifying the behaviors that characterize an educated person continue to pose a significant challenge within the education community (Rury, 2002; White, 2010). Richard Stanley Peters (1919−2011), a renowned British philosopher of education, is recognized for offering valuable insights that help address this enduring educational quandary.

Peters is widely recognized for his contribution to the advancement of educational thought and the stimulation of critical discussions regarding the purpose, meaning, and methods of education. Through his broadly acclaimed scholarly works, including *Education as Initiation* (1965), *Education and the Educationist* (1973), *Moral Development and Moral Education* (1981), and *Reason and Education* (1987), Peters left a lasting impact on the philosophy of education. Throughout his career, Peters courageously challenged reductionist views on education and offered a deeply nuanced perspective on the complex nature of educational processes.

The present review focuses on one of the philosophical works of Peters, "What is an Educational Process?" This work is part of a popular book titled *The Concept of Education,* which was edited by Peters himself (Peters, 2010). Originally published in 1967, the book was republished as an eBook in 2010.

This review is organized into three sections. While the first section attempts to critically review Peters' philosophical work, the second section endeavors to comment on his perspectives. Finally, the third section presents some concluding remarks and implications of Peters's perspectives for modern education systems.

Critical Review

Peters' "What is an Educational Process?" is one of the scholarly works that attempt to clarify the concepts of the educational process and the educated person. According to Peters, for a comprehensive understanding of education and the education process, the concept of education needs to be viewed in line with the *task-achievement* analysis. The central thesis of this analysis is that education should ultimately result in some sort of achievement. To achieve something through education, Peters posits that some tasks should be performed through an appropriate educational process. This position of the philosopher implies that it is through an in-depth understanding of three central concepts, i.e., achievements, tasks, and educational processes, that one can be insightful about the essence and processes of education.

The notion of *achievement, a*ccording to Peters, is a critical concept in the quest for a comprehensive understanding of education. In line with this, the author contends that there is no education unless the learner achieves something in the end. For him, education is an achievement-oriented concept so that a person who passes through an educational process should achieve something from that process. It is after satisfying this criterion that an individual could be considered an educated person.

In the meantime, Peters argues that 'achievement' is a multi-dimensional concept. *Knowhow (skill),* for example, could be considered an achievement provided that the person is able to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the principles behind the know-how attained. According to Peters, the mere possession of a particular skill does not necessarily guarantee that an individual has received an education. Instead, to be considered an educated person, the individual should understand the underlying principles of the skill that s/he has mastered.

This implies that *knowledge* is another important dimension of educational achievement. However, in Peters' analysis, knowledge acquired by any person should be relevant to life outside the classroom. In other words, the knowledge students acquire in an educational process should enable them not only to understand the society they are living in but also to make meaningful engagements aimed at transforming life in society. Peters further contends that the knowledge that learners acquire through education should not be inert. Instead, it must result in a kind of commitment from the learner's side.

In Peters' analysis, development in *attitudes* is another important dimension of educational achievement. For him, education should help the learner develop a positive attitude toward the knowledge s/he has already acquired, suggesting that any educational

achievement should embrace a moral aspect. In other words, students should regard the new achievement as worthwhile both for themselves and their society.

Peters also argued that it is only by performing some kind of *tasks* that a learner can be successful in educational achievement. For this purpose, both students and teachers need to perform different educational tasks. Being conscious, attentive, and active in the task to be performed is among the responsibilities expected of every student. On the other hand, *extrinsic aids* such as praising, rewarding, warmth, smiling, stimulating, facilitating, and conditioning should be practiced by the teacher. These teacher-related tasks should aim at helping students *pick things up*. In Peters' analysis, picking things up simply refers to developing positive attitudes or desirable behaviors through different teacher-related tasks.

Although tasks are crucial to help students pick up some desirable behaviors, the author posits that they may not always result in total achievements. Achievements such as those mentioned above can be attained only through a proper educational process. In this context, Peters suggested the following five educational processes: (1) training, (2) instruction and learning by experience, (3) teaching and learning of principles, (4) the transmission of critical thought, and (5) conversation and 'the whole man'.

In Peters' philosophy, *training* is an educational process that is always tailored toward the learning of skills. In this process, imitation and practice are given much credence, as skills cannot be developed by mere reading and instruction. *Instruction and learning by experience* is another educational process that emphasizes the provision of different relevant experiences, particularly first-hand experiences, to students. In the *teaching and learning of principles*, Peters underscored the need for an in-depth understanding of the principles behind the skills and knowledge that students acquired. For this purpose, teachers should encourage students to reflect on the knowledge they have learned and the skills they have mastered.

In the fourth educational process, the *transmission of critical thought*, Peters advocated for the inclusion of critical reflection in the instructional process. For him, critical reflection is a fundamental aspect of personal growth and intellectual development, thus, in any educational process, students should be encouraged to examine their own beliefs and assumptions through critical inquiry. Finally, in the fifth educational process, *conversation and the whole man*, the author stressed the importance of creating learning environments that enable students to see the world from others' viewpoints. In line with this, Peters emphasized the benefits of some informal approaches, such as conversations.

Comments on Peters' Perspectives

Richard S. Peters' philosophical positions on the concepts of the educational process and the educated person have several strengths. One of the strengths is his position on a holistic perspective of education and the educational process. The author stressed the importance of moral development, critical thinking, and personal growth as integral parts of an educational process. This perspective, the reviewer contends, is crucial to understanding the multifaceted nature of education and educational outcomes.

The author's position on reflective thinking also needs to be acknowledged. In his analysis, Peters underlined the centrality of reflective thinking in developing students' intellectual autonomy and enhancing self-analysis competency. Reflection and reflective

thinking, the reviewer believes, also help students develop coherent and thoughtful perspectives on various educational and societal issues.

Peters' perspectives on values and ethics are other sources of strength for the work under review. By emphasizing moral and ethical developments, Peters underlined the role that education should play in cultivating ethically informed individuals capable of making reasoned moral decisions. His position on the importance of values and ethics, the reviewer contends, is instrumental in developing a broader vision of education that extends beyond mere knowledge acquisition.

Another particular strength of Peters' perspective is his emphasis on the centrality of rigorous philosophical analyses in developing educational theories. By analyzing various philosophical perspectives, Peters brought a critical and reflective lens to educational concepts and practices. This analytical approach, the reviewer believes, is helpful for clarifying the aims, values, and methods of education and developing a more robust understanding of the educational process and the educated person.

While Peters' philosophical positions on the two concepts under discussion have much strength, there are also some limitations that need to be mentioned. One notable issue in this regard is the lack of exhaustive analysis of some sensitive social and political factors that significantly impact education and the educational process. This includes issues of power dynamics, fairness, equal rights, and social justice, all of which have formidable influences on education and long-lasting impacts on the quest for equitable access to educational opportunities for citizens.

Concluding Remarks and Implications

In the philosophical work reviewed, Peters challenged simplistic views of education and promoted broader understandings of the educational process and the educated person. For him, an educational process is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills but rather a holistic process encompassing both intellectual and moral development.

Similarly, an educated person is someone who possesses a wide range of knowledge and skills, including the ability to reflect on his/her values and beliefs. Intellectual curiosity, openness to new ideas, and engagement in reasoned debates are also designated key qualities of an educated person.

Peters' perspectives on the two concepts discussed have far-reaching implications for modern education systems. One of the implications is the need to have broad educational aims. As already mentioned, Peters criticized the reductionist view of education, which focuses solely on the acquisition of knowledge or the development of specific skills. Instead, he advocated for broader educational aims that promote moral development, critical thinking abilities, and full personal growth. This perspective implies the need for educational aims that focus on the preparation of well-rounded individuals who are capable of confronting the complexities that surround contemporary societies in a thoughtful manner.

In his work, Peters strongly emphasized the importance of reflection and critical thinking skills and highlighted the need to provide students with opportunities to question, analyze, and evaluate information instead of blindly accepting it. Modern education systems can gain advantages from this perspective by promoting inquiry-based learning, which

encourages students to critically examine various issues. Moreover, prioritizing a curriculum that inspires students to analyze, evaluate, and apply knowledge while deemphasizing instruction and assessment focused on memorization can greatly benefit national education systems.

Peters' analysis also emphasized the importance of providing meaningful and authentic learning experiences for students. He consistently elaborated the centrality of engaging students in real-world problems beyond the confines of classrooms. This perspective highlights the necessity of incorporating real-world applications and project-based instructional methods.

As Peters underscored, the role that teachers play in facilitating educational processes, creating supportive and nurturing learning environments, and promoting self-directed learning is crucial. Modern education systems can benefit from this perspective by promoting teacher–student collaboration, student–centered instruction, and formative assessment that empower students to take ownership of their learning.

Finally, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the two concepts discussed in this paper, the reviewer invites readers to explore the entire philosophical work of the author. The reviewer also encourages researchers to conduct analytical and empirical studies into the applications of these concepts within national education systems using Peters' philosophical perspectives as a framework for analysis.

References

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