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Aiming for World Peace by Promoting ‘Violence’ in Education

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Abstract
In order to contribute towards UNESCO’s goal of pursuing world peace, aims of education must transcend the limited scope of national self-interest which has dominated schooling systems in the West for the last two centuries and further back when the survival of each polis in Ancient Greece was of paramount importance. Aims must therefore become different and the environment that is thought best for this to occur is a democratic one. The case is made that such a democratic environment should involve opportunities to evaluate the value of current aims of education and to explore others in light of the pressing need to pursue peace on a global scale. In order to promote such a democratic environment of discussion and debate the notion of ‘violence’ is considered as a potential framework for such a re-evaluation. The sort of ‘violence’ that is called for is in reference to its use by Emmanuel Levinas who employed it emotively to misinterpret Kierkegaard. The use of this misapplied term ‘violence’ may nevertheless be of use in initiating the sort of inquiry of a Deweyean type regarded here to be necessary to improve aims of education democratically in order to pursue world peace.

The aim of UNESCO as stated in Article I of its Constitution, “is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations” (McKeon, 1951, p. v). It is within this context that for the signatory nations of UNESCO at least, one would anticipate that their aims of education would reference peace, collaboration, respect, justice and rights for humanity in a global sense rather than express only limited aims of national self-interest, which has been the hallmark of educational aims since schooling became compulsory in the West, beginning in Germany almost two hundred years ago.

In the late 1940s UNESCO recognised the need to undertake an inquiry into human rights. This was later followed by a second inquiry into democracy as it was democratic contexts that were understood to be necessary in order for the aspects of ‘collaboration’ and international understandings to flourish. This aspect was recognised by John Dewey who was one of the contributors to this symposium on democracy. Here he stated that, “the entire activity of UNESCO is centred in promotion of inquiry, discussion, and conference” (Dewey, 1951, p. 62). It would appear then that democracy requires ‘inquiry, discussion and conference’ and that this in turn requires regular re-evaluations of dominant world views which drive all aims of education.

In his contribution to this UNESCO symposium, Dewey gave what could be regarded to be a warning as well as a commentary on the success or otherwise of the role of UNESCO. He stated that “Given the present state of affairs both at home and in connection with other states, the way and degree in which we use or fail to use freedom of inquiry and public communication may well be the criterion by which in the end the genuineness of our democracy will be decided in all issues” (Dewey, 1951, p. 66). Here Dewey stressed the importance of exercising what he appreciated was a freedom to inquire and that this was a criterion of genuine democracy. This freedom, which he made clear in his various writings, was to enable persons to inquire into all sorts of issues. He was therefore opposed to any forms of dogma which he described as “fatal” to inquiry (Dewey, 1991a, p. 325). He identified that while freedom of inquiry was usually tolerated in the natural sciences, there was a tendency not to extend this tolerance into values, art, morality and religion, which were often treated to exist in a different realm to the physical materials under ‘natural’ scientific investigation. He was opposed to this assumption of two separate realms and argued that inquiry should be allowed the freedom to exist in these other aspects of human existence.

It is this second ‘realm’ of non-physical beliefs and values that one finds the various world-views from which aims of education are derived. I will now review Dewey’s notion of inquiry with respect to this second ‘realm’ in particular and explore how his notions of freedom and democracy could extend into how we should be open to inquiring into these in order to expose our aims of education to democratic deliberation in order to pursue the development of aims which can contribute to UNESCO’s mandate for world peace.
Dewey’s notion of Inquiry

Dewey was opposed to ‘knowledge’ as being the central focus of education. Rather he famously promoted the idea that educators should be learner-centred, that is, learners should be transformed into being able to participate in life in a certain manner that differentiated them from being uneducated. He described this educated manner variously, but often as the ability to inquire, think, and think reflectively. Dewey’s work followed that of Charles Peirce (1958, p. 99) who described inquiry as the “struggle to attain a state of belief” caused by an “irritation of doubt”. Dewey (1991b, pp. 14-16) also described inquiry as being related to doubt, but rather than ending this irritation by the formulation of a ‘belief’ or ‘knowledge’, he much preferred the term “warranted assertion” because this gives reference to the presence of an inquiry and is not a ‘stand alone’ element. Recently this has been usefully described by Boyles (2006) in the following:

Warranted assertions replace justification in the traditional syllogism while at the same time imploding the syllogism itself. Where justification served a correspondence theory of truth in the traditional account of knowledge, warranted assertions merge truth and inquiry together… The point, instead, is the interdependency of truths and the processes of inquiry… “Knowledge” is not the focal point of epistemology for Dewey: “knowing” is. (Boyles, 2006, p. 61)

This learner-centred approach which focuses on ‘knowing’ as a way-of-being rather than acquiring the product of knowledge is quite at odds with what we all too often witness in our systems of current schooling. Indeed Boyles argues that it is the traditional form of epistemology implicating a correspondence theory of truth which is dominant in U.S. classrooms and consequently stifles inquiry. He concludes that “most public school classrooms continue to be stultifying arenas of indoctrination” (Boyles, 2006, p. 68). Indoctrination has been described variously, but with reference to preventing active and free inquiry, I quite like Merry’s (2005, p. 406) recent description as involving “crippled reflective capacities” because without the ability to reflect one becomes a passive and compliant element which further enables dogmatism to reign.

Dewey (1991c, p. 13) described the notion of reflection or ‘reflective thinking’ as “the attitude of suspended conclusion” which is required in order “to maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry”. Elsewhere Dewey argued that the notion of ‘knowledge’ tended to terminate thinking altogether because the element of doubt was removed. He was opposed to this total removal of doubt by arguing that all the conclusions which are reached as a result of inquiry should lend themselves to other questions being raised for further inquiry and should not quench the questioning spirit. Dogma on the other hand, presents the conclusion before any inquiry commences and therefore stifles both the implications of certain doctrine and also the end purposes, or aims of the doctrine themselves. Dewey argued that:

Just because knowing is not self-enclosed and final but is instrumental to reconstruction of situations, there is always danger that it will be subordinated to maintaining some preconceived purpose or prejudice. Then reflection ceases to be complete; it falls short. (Dewey, 1988, p. 163)

In order to promote this approach of constant inquiry where conclusions are suspended in order to maintain a healthy state of doubt, Dewey often referred to the scientific method. Not that science demonstrates a particular ‘method’ as such (Feyerabend, 2003), but rather it was the experimental attitude or way-of-being that Dewey seemed to value, one that constantly scrutinizes, critiques and actively experiments. Again this reference to science is found in the works of Peirce who in turn referenced Francis Bacon. In his book Reconstruction of Philosophy, Dewey (1988) contrasted the scientific and experimental approach of Bacon with that of Aristotle. He described Bacon’s approach as an invasion of the unknown through active experimentation and discovery, and Aristotle’s as primarily involving demonstration and persuasion of what was already known. The former he termed as first-hand experience and the latter as second-hand experience. This has obvious implications for pedagogy in educative settings as only the former promotes a sense of being free to inquire.

Central to Dewey’s notion of the scientific attitude which activates inquiry is a healthy acceptance of doubt. He suggested that:
The scientific attitude may almost be defined as that which is capable of enjoying the doubtful; scientific method is, in one aspect, a technique for making a productive use of doubt by converting it into operations of definite inquiry. No one gets far intellectually who does not “love to think,” and no one loves to think who does not have an interest in problems as such. (Dewey, 1929, p. 228)

It was a concern to Dewey however that this scientific attitude to freely inquire into the nature of matter was all too often only tolerated in the physical realm and was not so easily tolerated in the realm of social and moral matters. He observed that:

Outside of physical inquiry, we shy from problems; we dislike uncovering serious difficulties in their full depth and reach; we prefer to accept what is and muddle along. Hence our social and moral “sciences” consist largely in putting facts as they are into conceptual systems framed at large. Our logic in social and humane subjects is still largely that of definition and classification as until the seventeenth century it was in natural science. For the most part the lesson of experimental inquiry has still to be learned in the things of chief concern. (Dewey, 1929, p. 251)

Here he laments that the studies of the social sciences had not advanced as natural science had because they did not promote the freedom to inquire into the social ‘norms’ which were all too often accepted superficially as ‘given’. Consequently the “things of chief concern” still remain to be properly examined. As Dewey (1958, p. 383) stated elsewhere, “the greater part of life goes on in a darkness unillumined by thoughtful inquiry.”

One of these ‘things of chief concerns’ is of course education, which Dewey (1929, p. 252) argued is possibly “the most significant”. This is because he considered it as institutionally representing intelligent action while being the key to the reconstruction of society. He described the institutional education of his time as largely remaining unenlightened by thoughtful inquiry, describing it as continuing to inculcate fixed conclusions (e.g. dogma) and failing to develop the intelligence of learners. While these comments are almost eighty years old I consider them to quite accurately reflect the practices that are predominantly found in the current schooling of the West and would like to encourage ourselves as educators to reconsider Dewey’s claim that ‘scientific’ forms of inquiry should be present in education, in particular, the aims of education themselves which determine the actual experiences offered to learners in the twenty-first century.

**Aims of Education**

According to Dewey (1985, p. 114) we do “well to remind ourselves that education as such has no aims. Only persons, parents, and teachers, etc., have aims, not an abstract idea like education.” He warned against passively accepting aims handed down from authorities in such a manner that they could not be critiqued, and also questioned whether there could even be aims which were ‘general and ultimate’ because each person’s existence consists in specific activities and the meanings of these should not be limited in advance by restrictive aims. R.S. Peters also recognised the abstract nature of the term ‘education’ and like Dewey, claimed that it does not have any aims of itself. He argued that “the quick reply to the question ‘What is the aim of education?’ must resemble the quick reply to the question ‘What is the aim of life?’, namely ‘It has not got one’” (Peters, 1973, p. 1). In this same article, Peters argued that as life itself is apparently pointless, then education should enable persons to come to terms with this and be able to give point to life. Peters appears to promote quite an existential perspective in this particular article.

However the holistic view of Dewey can also be understood to portray quite an existential perspective too. It would be difficult however, to apply the label ‘existentialist’ to Dewey – or for that matter any other label because he appears to be too complex to be easily categorised. But he does refer to the entire ‘life of the child’ that should be centred for education – in contrast to the often centred cognitive understandings as per the various forms of constructivism. He identified what he referred to as “the existential matrix of inquiry” (Dewey, 1991b) as consisting of both the biological and cultural embeddedness of individuals and which subsequently greatly influences how individuals make meanings from what they understand to be significant. He recognised that all of our activities, even the ‘logical’ and ‘scientific’ ones, are all given sense and activated upon by purposes which emerge out of a background or framework of personal significance.
This is much like the ‘horizon of significance’ that Charles Taylor (1991, p. 37) refers, who also describes it as the “background of intelligibility” against which our various experiences can be given their meanings. He describes that this horizon consists of “(a) our notions of the good. (b) our understandings of self… (c) the kinds of narrative in which we make sense of our lives, and (d) conceptions of society” (Taylor, 1989, p. 105). He argues that there is a connection between all four of these aspects which in their unity give sense to our personal identity and also give purpose and meaning to our lives. It is from this horizon then that both of Peters’ questions are to be answered – the aim of life and the aim of education.

This notion of a ‘horizon’ as the background of life’s meanings and which provides personal significance, plays a very important role in the works of Dewey – although he does not directly use this same terminology. Even although he can be understood to be a supporter of democracy and the reconstruction of society, he argued that all of this is only made possible by individual persons, as social beings, being committed to something they regard to be personally significant. He encouraged those of us who have aims of education not to set our sights on only nationalistic agendas. He identified that such limited aims which are focussed on living well only within narrowly defined interests are simply a continuation of the intention behind the introduction of compulsory schooling which originated in Germany. The emphasis then consisted of both national unity and national military defence. He encouraged a much more global vision of humanity in general such as espoused by UNESCO and argued that the “proper end of education” should be “the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as humanity” beyond any nationalistic agendas (Dewey, 1985, p. 101). He then asked the question, “Who, then, shall conduct education so that humanity may improve?”, and answered with the following:

We must depend upon the efforts of enlightened men [sic] in their private capacity. …Simply through the efforts of persons of enlarged inclinations, who are capable of grasping the ideal of a future better condition, is the gradual approximation of human nature to its end possible.” (Dewey, 1985, pp. 101-2)

Dewey’s notion of democracy in education is one that involves the interests of all involved parties – parents, teachers, administrators and of course the learners themselves. All individuals are to be moved by understanding significance in pursuing personal commitments to certain social relationships and ‘habits of mind’ towards a better future which transcends various forms of national self-interest. The various horizons of understanding should include the UNESCO attributes of collaboration, respect, justice and rights if world peace is to be seriously included as an aim of education.

Through Dewey we are reminded that the origin of our schooling systems is one which promoted national unity and security by promoting a culture in the mass population that sought after national or local self-interests. We can see through the practices of our current schooling that this original aim of schooling continues to dominate here in Australia. Even the most recent federal government’s efforts at values education include nationalistic ‘Australian’ ideas on values and military symbols such as heroes from Gallipoli. The challenge then, if aims of education are to take up the challenge of UNESCO in seeking peace between nations, is to, as Dewey described, formulate a vision of humanity in general – beyond national self-interests. But how is this to be achieved?

Aims of Education as Inquiry

Using a Deweyean perspective, I am arguing that aims of education, whether one is a parent, teacher or learner, should be forms of inquiry. Consequently there should be an intellectual thoroughness invested in these aims. In addition, once articulated, these aims should continue to be open for further inquiry as to the value that they might or might not hold for particular subsequent experiences if they are to be appropriate for democratic contexts. That is as an inquiry, these aims are never ‘finished’ or finalised, they are continually being reconstructed. Every activity that we engage ourselves has some aim, some ‘end purpose’ to it. These ends provide the significance of the meanings we give to these activities. However, as ends, or in Dewey’s terms, ‘ends-in-view’ these should emerge as a consequence of our giving meaning to our experiences and should not dictate the conclusions of our experiences in advance. Consequently it is necessary that these aims, as ends-in-view, be dynamic and responsive to each succeeding experience in which we engage ourselves.
One of the many dualisms that Dewey was opposed to was the notion that there are two realms – one of physical substances and one of values and morals. In the former he observed that there is almost universal agreement that the scientific ‘method’ – or attitude – has enabled physical science to progress as a consequence of its experimental procedures. This includes the aims and purposes for science also being inquired into by being ‘doubtful’ as to their validity. Inquiry in science is free to scrutinize, critique and experiment with the various materials which are considered of interest to particular aims. However, this sense of inquiry is not equally free to investigate in the ‘realm’ of values and morality where the ‘ends-in-view’ are often ‘off-limits’ to experiment. Dewey described this as a form of dogma, where ends are given by authorities but do not lend themselves to be inquired into. They must be accepted as ‘givens’.

Communities are understood to exist because of common aims and aspirations which are communicated with each other and with younger generations. This commonality between the terms ‘communities’, ‘common’ and ‘communication’ was recognised by Dewey in the first chapter of his book *Democracy and Education*. This is all the more significant if the community we envisage is a global one, involving the commitment of people world-wide to the common aspirations of understanding others and securing peace. The necessity for a democratic environment then can be appreciated in order for this openness of discussion and inquiry to take place. Indeed Dewey argued that the communication of such aspirations to the younger generations is basically what education is about. However the nature of this communication is not one of transmission. It does not involve the ‘hammering in’ of beliefs to impressionable minds as this could not amount to more than, as Dewey (1985, p. 22) described, conveying “second-hand information as to what others think”. Rather it involves an invitation into a democratic environment in order to discuss and explore how human betterment might be made possible, and where the ‘best ideas’ are up for re-evaluation and reconstruction. Dewey (1985, p. 23) therefore concluded that “we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment.”

The educative value of indirect communication has also been recognised by Søren Kierkegaard who understood that direct communication had little effect in enabling people to change their minds. He often wrote pseudonymous works in order to challenge some of the commonly accepted ‘givens’ in his country of Denmark. In one of his more ‘direct’ writings, he explained why he wrote indirectly. He explained that most self-professed Christians were under an illusion in calling themselves by the name ‘Christian’ and he also observed “that an illusion is not easy to remove” (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 42). He then went on to argue how an illusion could be removed by arguing that:

An illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly. If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done indirectly, not by someone who loudly declares himself to be an extraordinary Christian, but by someone who, better informed, even declares himself not to be a Christian. That is, one who is under an illusion must be approached from behind. (Kierkegaard, 1998, p. 43)

One of his pseudonymous authors was Johannes Climacus, who indeed professed not to be a Christian. He stated that “At one time it was perilous to profess being a Christian; now it is precarious to doubt that one is” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 51). But doubt was considered by Kierkegaard to be essential for reflection and therefore well worth living a life of precariousness. He argued that doubt was often experienced as an anxiety, and that anxiety was the interface between possibility and actuality (Kierkegaard, 1980). Doubt is therefore a necessary experience if one is to leap into the unknown, to become transformed or educated in some valuable way. He too valued a healthy form of doubt as enabling the possibility of further change, education or becoming, and he identified that indirect communication is essential for this development to occur.

Kierkegaard (1992, p. 74) identified that direct communication required one to be certain, to not have any doubts whatsoever, and claimed that this must be impossible if persons are to be considered as being perpetually in a process of becoming. He argued that “one who is existing is continually in the process of becoming… the perpetual process of becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain” (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 86). This description of uncertainty as the existential challenge for human existence is remarkably similar to Dewey (1958, p. 41) who described that “Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it baldly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk; it is uncertain,
unstable, uncannily unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconstant, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons.” While Dewey’s focus was primarily upon reconstructing society and Kierkegaard’s was on re-evaluating Christianity, both understood human life as one of uncertainty. In one of his footnotes, Kierkegaard’s Climacus explains how reflection is difficult because it requires one to accept and live with this uncertainty of life, to always have one’s conclusions suspended (to use Dewey’s description), when one is open to infinite possibilities of meanings. He argues that:

The thoroughly educated and developed individuality is known by how dialectical the thinking is in which he has his daily life. To have his daily life in the decisive dialectic of the infinite and yet to go on living – that is the art. Most people have comfortable categories for daily use and the categories of the infinite only on solemn occasions, that is, they never have them. But to have the dialectic of the infinite for daily use and to exist in it is, of course, the greatest strenuousness, and in turn the greatest strenuousness is needed lest the practice, instead of exercising a person in existing, deceptively trick him out of it. – It is well known that a cannonade makes a person unable to hear, but it is also well known that by persevering one can hear every word just as when all is quiet. And that is the way it is with a spiritual existence intensified by reflection. (Kierkegaard, 1982, p. 86)

Here Kierkegaard stressed that to be in a state of authentic existence, in a state of becoming, it requires a continued willingness to endure doubt and uncertainty in order to reflect, and that this is a most difficult thing to do – and yet is most essential for our existing as human persons. I consider this to accord very well with Dewey’s conception of inquiry as a way-of-being, because he argued that our ultimate meanings of life, such as what it means to be a Christian, should always be open for doubt, critique and re-evaluation.

Inquiry as ‘Violence’

While Kierkegaard openly called himself a ‘villain’ because he concealed himself in pseudonymous authors and attempted to deceive his readers into living a more authentic existence, he has been accused by others in various defamatory ways. David Breese (1990, p. 217) a former president of Christian Destiny Ministries, claimed that Kierkegaard’s Existentialism is similar to other atheistic existentialists who all deny “any consistent morality”. Probably more damning however is Emmanuel Levinas who stated:

What disturbs me in Kierkegaard may be reduced to two points.
The first point. Kierkegaard rehabilitated the subjectivity – the unique, the singular – with comparable strength…
The second point. It is Kierkegaard’s violence that shocks me. The manner of the strong and the violent, who fear neither scandal nor destruction, has come, since Kierkegaard and before Nietzsche, a manner of philosophy. One philosophizes with a hammer. In that permanent scandal [or “permanent provocation” as per Rée’s 1998 translation], in that opposition to everything, I perceive by anticipation the echoes of certain cases of verbal violence … I am thinking not only of National Socialism… That harshness of Kierkegaard emerges at the exact moment when he transcends ethics”… The ethical means the general, for Kierkegaard. (Levinas, 1996, p. 76)

In this comment the emotive term ‘violence’ is employed to offer an almost self-evident condemnation on Kierkegaard, especially so when in the same paragraph Levinas also refers to the National Socialism which was behind the extermination of so many of his fellow Jews. Levinas, himself a survivor of the Nazi horrors, specifically refers to Kierkegaard’s ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ as portrayed in his book Fear and Trembling as an example of his ‘permanent provocation’. Here Kierkegaard claimed that the ethical was the universal, it applied to all persons for every moment and for every experience of their lives. It was its own telos (end, purpose) and did not need to refer to anything beyond itself for its purpose. No horizons of significance are necessary to grant it value. Therefore he concluded that ethically speaking the biblical patriarch Abraham is guilty of murder as he intended to murder his son Isaac. However he drew attention to the paradox that religiously speaking (in contrast to the ethical) Abraham did not have the intent of murder but rather had the intent of sacrifice. He stated:

Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal – yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the
single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost…” (Kierkegaard, 1983, p. 55)

Here Kierkegaard has endeavoured to explain that the religious relation one has with the divine being of God might be such that one is required to go beyond ethical duty. Levinas (1996, p. 77) however contended that an opposite interpretation of this same event is possible and claimed that “Abraham’s attentiveness to the voice that led him back to the ethical order, in forbidding him to perform a human sacrifice, is the highest point in the drama.” Quite obviously there is more in this comment than a philosophical critique.

Kierkegaard was engaging with the Christological significance of Isaac as the son of Abraham being in effect ‘dead’ for the journey of three days and three nights to the mountain where he was then ‘resurrected’, whereas Levinas is coming from the Jewish perspective which maintains the integrity of the ten commandments, including of course ‘thou shalt not kill’. What Levinas therefore fails to appreciate is that Kierkegaard is inviting a serious reflection upon the meaning and significance that one assumes one’s personal existence to have in the context of being a Christian. He is evoking a certain amount of doubt through the paradoxes he presents in order for persons to inquire further into their own existence. In his indirect writings designed to provoke, he frequently asks ‘what is the meaning of life?’ and in particular for his own special purpose, ‘what does it really mean to be a Christian?’.

This call to inquire into ethics, values, religion and morality by Kierkegaard is actually described by Levinas to be ‘violent’. Presumably Levinas would just as quickly employ this term ‘violent’ to describe Jesus because he claimed “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34) and yet I doubt if he would also call scientific inquiries into sub-atomic particles being smashed in proton accelerators a ‘violent’ affair. This brings us back to the problem identified by Dewey earlier that we assume a two realm existence – one for physical science, where one is free to inquire, and the other of values and morality where inquiry into assumed authoritative principles and truths, such as the Jewish Ten Commandments, is ‘off limits’. Not only does Dewey call for the ‘scientific’ approach to being free to inquire as also having relevance in the ‘realm’ of values and morality, but scientists are also calling for this inquiry involving the subjectivity and ‘passion’ of humanity to also be more clearly recognised in the sciences themselves. According to Feyerabend (1993, p. 154), “I believe that a reform of the sciences that makes them more anarchic and more subjective (in Kierkegaard’s sense) is urgently needed.” There is not a two-realm division between physical materialism and the subjectivity of human persons with their passions, horizons of significance, values and personal aims and purposes – including aims of education.

Promoting ‘Violence’ in Education

I should qualify here that I am not employing the term ‘violence’ in any manner that might be construed as an attack upon the rights or well-being of persons or of any other living entities. I am simply employing it in the emotive sense to which Levinas has used it above, in order to provoke an indirect and ‘shocking’ tactic which encourages persons to inquire more deeply than they might otherwise be inclined. Therefore as the topic to be addressed is ‘aims of education’, I am encouraging that we should foster a ‘violent’ hammering of the aims of education that various persons have, including pre-service teachers, teachers, students, administrators and politicians. This involves an engagement with the bigger issues as to what education is thought to be aiming at and to see if it compares favourably with UNESCO’s aim of world peace.

My telos for adopting the almost confrontational approach is in line with Dewey’s arguments – to allow for the possibility of forming better ends-in-view or ‘aims’ with regards to education in the particular contexts in
which we find ourselves. This engagement allows opportunity to address what is meant by the ‘good life’ and can be employed to determine whether particular aims are supporting only narrow nationalistic interests or more valuably – the interests of humanity in general and contributes towards UNESCO’s primary aim.

It is argued here that to be ‘violent’ towards particular aims of education simply means, in Nietzschean terms, to re-evaluate them. It means to be willing to inquire into the value that aims might have for current situations. It is contended here that this re-evaluation into aims of education requires them to be doubted and that this can often be facilitated by indirect communication. Such inquiries do not rely upon any intrinsic value being held by particular aims. The value of aims can only be understood in terms of their relation to how significance is understood within specific experiences and their relation to horizons of significance. Pring (1976, pp. 6-7) usefully reminds us of the specificity of aims of education when he asks ‘what does it mean to educate these pupils?’ as being distinctly different from the more general question ‘what does it mean to educate these pupils?’. This latter question asks us for our understanding regarding the general nature of education, while the former refers to a specific situation, for how a certain ‘betterment’ (Peters 1967, p. 25) might be offered to particular persons at a particular time. Such specific aims of education can only be developed in particular contexts otherwise we would need to refer to learners in general and overlook the unique individuals that we as educators encounter.

Charles Taylor (1991, p. 18) has identified that the opportunity to engage with and contribute to discussions of the good life, what the meaning and purposes of life might be, has been banished to the margins of political debate. He is very much in favour of bringing such discussions into the open by individually committing ourselves to democratically deliberating in public forums what ought to be our end purposes. This holds a special challenge for education because so often aims are ‘off limits’ for critique as some governments claim they have already determined what these will be through their identified outcomes and standards.

For example the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DE&T), while attempting to restrict the definition of ‘professionalism’ for teachers to include only their specialised knowledge and skills in their particular content areas and has also restricted learning to an effective rather than educative activity. They specifically emphasise that it is solely the role of the other government department called the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority to “define what students should know and be able to do at different levels of schooling” and therefore teachers, as professionals, are excluded from entering into debate on the value of these particular aims (DE&T, 2005, p. 3). This State government department is marginalising any discussion on the aims of education as outlined in their Victorian Essential Learning Standards by so called ‘professional’ teachers. This is quite at odds however with the Senate (2003) of the Federal Parliament who specifically have articulated that as professionals, teachers should have “control of standards” as developed through educative aims. This latter view is also consistent with the former Director of the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford – Richard Pring (2004, p. 75) – who argued that the significance of professionalism for teachers, refers to “a body of people who, by reason of distinctive expertise and values, are to be regarded with respect to what should be learnt, how it should be learnt, and what purposes that learning should serve.” The Victorian government, by attempting to exclude teachers from critiquing and discussing their aims and standards, are at odds with how professionalism is understood by other significant parties, and are guilty of attempting to banish any such discussions as described above by Taylor.

Similarly to Dewey and Peirce, Taylor argues that the scientific (experimental) method of Bacon should be adopted in the field of morality and life purposes, explaining:

Francis Bacon criticized the traditional Aristotelian sciences for having contributed nothing “to relieve the condition of mankind.” He proposed in their stead a model of science whose criterion of truth would be instrumental efficacy. You have discovered something when you can intervene to change things. Modern science is in essential continuity in this respect with Bacon. But what is important about Bacon is that he reminds us that the thrust behind this new science was not only epistemological by also moral. (Taylor, 1991, p. 104)

Here Taylor expresses a view of ‘truth’ that is akin to the pragmatist perspective. As such, ends in themselves can be inquired into in order to improve them. As ends determine the value of aims through how
they are understood to relate specific experiences to an overall horizon of significance, they in themselves should be part of the deliberation of re-evaluation.

Taylor explains that this ability to participate in discussions about ends and aims requires employing what he describes as ‘democratic initiative’. But he warns that this democratic initiative has been weakened by market economic forces and over-bureaucratic state control (Taylor, 1991, p. 112). This point is also identified in John Ralston Saul’s *The Unconscious Civilization* (1997) who adds that creativity and inquiry is prevented by the imposition of a ‘fixed world view’ by these same economic and political forces. He claims that “we do live in a corporatist society, where the public good is minimized” and where opportunity to inquire into this imposed one world view is discouraged because corporatism itself creates a conformist consciousness among citizens (Saul, 1997, pp. 94 & 139). Part of his solution is to promote democracy by encouraging *individuals* to become more actively involved in the democratic process. Another aspect of his solution is to shake up governments with “a severe crisis” to remind them of their responsibilities. This notion of a ‘severe crisis’ is similar to how I am conceptualising the use of ‘violence’ in order to encourage us to inquire into our own horizons of significance and also the world-views which drive the aims of education prescribed by authorities.

To prevent opportunity to inquire into the world-views which dominate our practices in a community to accept dogma – is tantamount to oppression. Paulo Freire claimed that oppressive regimes by their very nature do not permit persons under their domain who are ‘oppressed’ to ever question ‘Why?’ He concluded that “any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence” (Freire, 2000, p. 85), where ‘violence’ may not necessary be physical abuse, but is certainly an oppression of them as human persons and their ability to question, inquire, critique and make their own decisions. I am also employing the term ‘violence’ here as a recommended response to the ‘violence’ (as per Freire) of oppressors, but I quite accept that others may opt for a peaceable protest as being a more appropriate response. I am therefore using the term ‘violence’ in a very restricted sense as mentioned above.

**Conclusion**

If ‘violence’ can be understood here as Levinas has employed it – to represent a ‘permanent provocation’ by taking a hammer to world views, the meanings of life, values and aims in order to re-evaluate them, then this is the sort of existential violence I am asking us to consider adopting for our various aims of education. The purpose of this is to keep the democratic spirit alive and oppose dogmatism. It is only possible to have ‘inquiry, discussion and conference’ as Dewey has called for, *if* there are opposing points of view. This may require us to consider other perspectives via indirect communication in order to re-evaluate the aims that we consider to be most valuable. Becoming existentially ‘violent’ to sound out educational aims and the world views from which they emerge, does not necessarily equate to rejecting them. Through the process of inquiry we can become much more appreciative and passionate about them.

A Nietzschean re-evaluation of values, or in our case, evaluating the value of educational aims, accords well with Dewey and his notion of inquiry. He argued that our actions are driven by our judgments and that these in turn are formed through e-valuations. He stated:

> I now come to consideration of judgments about valuations-values; namely to the topic of e-valuations. …I would say that there are such events as e-valuating inquiries terminating in judgments… It seems to be generally admitted that genuine inquiry, resulting in genuine judgments, is possible and desirable in the case of so-called instrumental values. But it is often held that in the case of so-called final or ultimate values all that is possible is communication of a particular item of information, namely, that they are or have been valued, plus strangely enough, in some cases, the assertion that they *ought* to be universally valued, although no reason can be given beyond the assertion that they are “ends in themselves.” As against this view, which is bound to play “logically” and practically into the hands of external “authorities,” formulation of a comprehensive theory of the connection of evaluations with *de facto* occurrent valuings is indispensable. (Dewey, 1991a, p. 353)
Here Dewey adds to his case against intrinsic values as they tend to restrict inquiry and play too readily into the hands of authorities to allow them to, in Freire’s terms, ‘oppress’ through dogma. Dewey explained that principles such as values, purposes or aims which are presented as if they did have intrinsic value and hence are ‘off limits’ to being provoked and inquired into, could lead to fanaticism where any means could be justified in order to attain their ends. For education this could equate to any form of pedagogy being tolerated if the sanctioned standard outcomes of authorities are being attained.

An important aspect of the discussion and deliberation that is characteristic of individuals exercising their democratic initiative is that better ends might emerge. To pursue UNESCO’s primary aim of world peace by examining what it might mean to educate humanity as humanity beyond national identities, requires some different approaches to what has characteristically been aimed for to date in institutionalised education. In order to improve upon the various ‘normal’ aims of education currently practised, there is a requirement to have some abnormal aims to consider. This is exactly the point argued by Thomas Kuhn (1970) in relation to science, that abnormal thinking is responsible for revolutionising our understandings within this field of study. However Dewey (1991a, p. 391) remarked that intellectuals, at least the ones he observed in his day, tended to avoid the potential ‘violent’ aspects often associated with revolutions and opted instead for the slower but more sure manner of evolutionary development. I, however, am arguing against our inclination to adopt slower evolutionary change because I suspect that implicit in this attitude is also a weakening of our democratic initiative as Taylor warns. Instead I am asking us to consider doubting the often taken-for-granted aims of education that we as individual professionals have and those of our governments in order to foster a climate of discussion, debate and inquiry. As I consider that it is only in such a democratic environment that our aims of education, by being ‘violently’ re-evaluated through philosophical hammering, can transcend national self-interest and be able to contribute to UNESCO’s pursuit of world peace.

References


