The Community of Inquiry as a Social Reform: Challenging Standardization in Schools through a juxtaposition of Aquinas’ notion of Connatural Learning, Dewey’s Centrality of Experience and Buber’s concept of Dialogue

by

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Abstract

Education imbibes the processes of drawing from within and connecting with the
world. Schools which practice standardization have not become a place where students
are provided with connections and experiences that enable them to learn and link with the
environment, impeding the cultivation of critical thinking and the students’ abilities to
exercise ‘knowing-how and knowing-why’. I strongly argue against standardization in
schools. Education must be a critical field where learning comes from questioning,
discovery and flourishing with the vast tapestry of life experiences that is imbibed
through the community of inquiry – collaboration among the students and teachers. I aim
to explore the possibility of resolving the problem of standardization in schools through
the community of inquiry as a social reform. As a means of social reform, I characterize
the community of inquiry through a juxtaposition of Aquinas’ notion of connatural
learning, Dewey’s centrality of experience and Buber’s concept of dialogue.
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Key words:
Democracy in Schools, Connatural Learning, Reflective and Educative Experience, Dialogue, Community of Inquiry

“The teacher’s presentations are like tools that the natural reason of the student uses to come to an understanding of things…”
- Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, (Question 11: De Veritate, 1265-1274)

“We always live at a time we live and not some other time and only by extracting at each present time, the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future”
- John Dewey, Experience and Education (1938)

“On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of ‘between’”
- Buber, Between Man and Man (1947)

Chapter 1: Introduction

The famous Confucian virtue of rectification of names (zhèngmíng; 正名) and Plato’s (429-347 B.C.E.) conception of education for national development and social efficiency best sum up the ideals of education, standardization and curriculum alignment, that we have in educational practices in most societies today. In the Analects, Confucius (551-
479 B.C.E) famously adheres that to have a well ordered society, the first thing to do is to rectify names; otherwise affairs will not be accomplished (13:3). For a Confucian society, every person has a social standing and a name or role to stand up for; with the name, comes the duties and responsibilities. With the straightforward carrying out of relational duties\(^1\), it is supposed that problems of a society will be resolved and a righteous government will be achieved. On the other hand, since Plato believes in a vigorous society cultivated by learning and adaptation of roles, he claims education as a means to serve both the individual and the state. Plato’s own conception of education is all about being moral and just. He regards justice as virtue whereby “each [is] performing his proper share” (Cahn, 2009, p. 103). Highly regarded, ancient philosophers from the east and the west, such as Confucius and Plato, have greatly shaped how education is viewed as a tool to concoct orderliness in the society. To a certain extent, this orderliness would be beneficial as a method of educational quality control (Wraga, 1999) for governments and societies where human capital as the prime resource, must be streamed to the needs of the country. To

\(^1\) Confucius relates the following primary relations: father to son, elder brother to younger brother, husband to wife, elder to younger and ruler to subject.
use teaching and learning in the service of a social efficiency model is to prepare students in their eventual role in life. This would assume that they would be more equipped and useful to the society. In a social efficiency model, students would only be taught what they would need for the future (Kliebard, 2004). However, this would mean that while a system of school standardization was created as a means to serve the professional spheres of the market (Gramsci, 1971), the real purpose of education is challenged. Although there are select educators and theorists who feel that standardization and curriculum alignment are beneficial for students (Andersen, 1998), I echo the belief that treating education as a commodity that presents a narrow curriculum (Crocco & Costigan, 2007) through standardization, to a large extent, destroys the spirit of education and teaching and learning as processes where critical, engaging, and self-reflective ideas are cultivated (Giroux, 2010).

I am from Singapore, and was a teacher there for almost a decade. From primary school to university, our educational system focuses on the importation of knowledge about facts rather than knowledge of skills. Through a pragmatic form of governance that sustains economic  

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2 Education comes from the Latin word *educare*, which roots from the verb *educe*, which means to draw forth from within.
prosperity, education has been a tool for social engineering and has to a large extent set aside the individual learner’s dispositions. In any case, the solid national education implemented in Singapore can still be regarded as a tie that binds the promotion of state values, especially that of peace and prosperity, in order to address the challenges that this very multicultural country face. Promoting national development and social efficiency, Singapore, as a young small nation which became independent in 1965, had to sacrifice the significance of a robust experiential learning approach and cultivation of reasoning in education for greater economic productivity and national security. As a country with only human resource to depend on, I cannot initially and totally blame the Singaporean government in its way to veer education as a tool for economic efficacy. It has worked for Singapore as a state for some 40 years, but I surmise that it may not work once citizens, young students including, realize that creativity and not the process of teaching and learning that is

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3 Singapore is composed of four ethnic groups: majority are Chinese about 70% of the population, Malays are about 13%, Indian, most of whom are from South India are about 9% and others are a mix of Asian, Eurasian and even Caucasian races. Singapore is also a home to many expatriates being the business hub of Southeast Asia. The multicultural kaleidoscope and cosmopolitan nature of Singapore’s population are avenues for opportunities as well as sources of challenges.

4 Spanning 42 kilometers from east to west, and 23 kilometers north to south, Singapore is a small yet densely populated country with 4.5 million people.
predetermined, pre-paced, and pre-structured, are needed for a more dynamic nation-building to occur.

Currently, the Singapore educational structure, supposedly following the British or Commonwealth system of education, aims to produce students who excel in standardized tests. From there, students are streamed on what opportunities they can take and are somewhat limited with their options should they not do well in the exams⁵. As a result, the Singaporean students, even at primary levels are hot-housed by an educational system that makes sure that they do very well in exams. This prevalent system that cultivates the culture of doing well in exams has a great implication on the pedagogical realities and

⁵ Singapore students are tested at the end of Primary 6 (aged 12/13) with the Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE). The results of this examination will determine if they are going to a Normal Secondary School (5 years) or Express Secondary School (4 years). Normal Secondary School stream students have very slim chances of going to a Junior College, Polytechnic College or University. Most of the times, they are only eligible for the Institute of Technical Education after high school. Also, good, elite express secondary schools have a high or competitive cutoff grade in order to admit students. If the students barely passed the exams and they do not meet the competitive cutoff by elite schools, the students go to a neighborhood secondary school and they take a Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) test (O’Level) at the end of Secondary 4. This will determine if they can be registered for a Junior College or Polytechnic Institute or the Institute of Technical Education. Being in an elite express school for the intellectually gifted means the students are somewhat automatically admitted to elite Junior Colleges and then Universities. After secondary school, neighborhood schools’ express stream, students will take GCE O’Levels. This will determine if the student is eligible for Junior College or Polytechnic Institutes. If the student is eligible for Junior College, his/her admittance depends on the results of the exams. After Junior College, students will take the GCE A’Levels to determine if he/she is eligible for university studies. If he/she fails, she may only take a Polytechnic education. There are more complex streaming and standardization in the universities in Singapore (bell curve grading, etc.).
approaches a teacher in Singapore can limitedly utilize. Because the students need to be tested at the end of course and the exam results become a matter of life and death (literally and socially, in terms of upward mobility), the banking model of education\textsuperscript{6} governs pedagogy. The teacher gives the lecture, the students write down notes (as verbatim as they can), the teacher drills the students, the students do revisions and the cycle continues. Some students from affluent families who are able to pay for private tuition in order to hasten their memorization skills that are needed to pass the exams would actually avail of private tutorial lessons for a series of revisions to prepare them for the examinations. The controlling feature of Singapore’s education system starts the cycle of the passivity: the teacher is active and the student is passive. Such feature also leads to a large extent, to a paternalistic\textsuperscript{7} relationship between the state and its citizens. As a Singaporean teacher traversing within the politics of my location, I know that no teacher, however good would be able to encapsulate the student’s learning

\textsuperscript{6} In Paulo Freire’s (1921-1997) words, “education...becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits in which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education... one that has a lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge...” (Freire, \textit{Pedagogy of the Oppressed}, 1970, p. 53).

\textsuperscript{7} See Spar, Deborah, “What Higher Education can learn from Singapore” (http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ff0905s.pdf)
experience or even the diverse ways of students’ abilities to learn. The absence of connatural learning\(^8\) between the teachers and the students, the lack of a knowledge that requires the centrality of experience as a salient feature to understand the subject being studied and the nonexistence of dialogue between the teacher and the student, undermines what education is totally about. While my students may always re-state the facts as mentioned to them and “withdraw” them well during exams, many of them do not see the relevance of what they are studying and how are they going to connect and apply their learning in real life. In greater aspects, some do not even understand the real purpose of education. It is also very difficult for me as an instructor of Theory of Knowledge, a subject based on Epistemology, to teach students just to study the facts because the scope my subject and its methodology is all about critical evaluation, searching, doubting, questioning and not a simple appeal to authority. This implies that standardization as an assessment and measurement process

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\(^8\) I define connatural learning as an engaging process, by which two persons equally learn from each other. They are both subjects and there is no superior or inferior dichotomy. The term ‘connatural and connatural learning’ were extracted from Thomas Aquinas’ (1225-1274) educational philosophy by T. Brian Mooney and Mark Nowacki in “Aquinas on Connaturality and Education” in Aquinas, Education and the East (New York: Springer, 2013, pp. 27-46).
cannot be used in many subjects and parts of the curriculum that the students learn in schools.

‘Learning is not Flat’: How Standardization devalues Education, Professionalizes teaching and puts people of color into a disadvantageous position

A famous contemporary philosopher of education, Nel Noddings (1984) sees the conflict that is present in standardization and grading practices in educational systems. These practices make education systems establish so many hierarchies, cascades to issues of social justice as well as too much professionalization of teaching. Professionalization brings the absence of care and Noddings notes that education must draw a vigilant reflection on the role of teachers in the facilitation and formation of the kind of togetherness that is not usually developed in a flat or linear manner, rather in a volitionally accepted and willed relationship between the one-caring and the one being cared-for amidst the reality of great difference. The act of inclusion in education is meeting the other and acknowledging and knowing that there is great uniqueness in

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9 It must be clear that like Noddings, I do not argue against the practice of professionalism in education and the academe. I believe that to a large extent professionalism promotes the integrity of any educational process. However, rigid practice of professionalism brings the absence of the human aspects of promoting well-being and compassion throughout the educational process.
the other, whose intelligence, being and whole person cannot just be measured quantitatively, by grades or numbers. In this sense, reciprocal ethical relations are paramount in order to develop a full-bodied education that recognizes the child, the student as a person first, a human being with full potential and a learner, second.\(^\text{10}\)

Also, according to Fromm (1955) “if one had decided the value of an idea on the basis of numbers, we would still be dwelling in caves” (p. 340)\(^\text{11}\). By bringing quantitative measures to ensure student learning, there is little room for originality or creativity on the part of teachers or students as they are expected to just prepare to have correct answers elicited to specific, direct

\(^{10}\) Noddings’ philosophy certainly forgoes the either-or theories in education, the fixed active (teacher) and passive (student) identities, and the hierarchical status between the dominant person and the dependent partner that promotes a great divide between teachers and students. It also opens education to an atmosphere of liberty as required by genuine dialogue and challenges some cultures and states where paternal religious education is still being practiced.

\(^{11}\) Plato’s first presentation of his views on human nature is found in his famous Allegory of the Cave in the Book VII of the Republic. The image of people trapped in the cave where they can only understand things and build knowledge from imagination and illusion, present the idea that man is born sheltered in ignorance. Humans are like prisoners and as Socrates conversed with Glaucon in this part of the Republic says: humans are like “those who were chained would consider nothing besides the shadows of the artifacts as the unhidden.” For Plato, man is a soul that seeks transcendence from these appearances which cloud reality. Truth and knowledge are never attained by seeking appearance alone, but from a reality that is reflected from ideas. Plato’s conception of human nature is embedded within his belief that there is primacy in the world of ideas (forms) and anything that is there in the world of matter is just an imperfect imitation of what it is in the world of ideas. Knowledge then is acquired through recollection - the process of helping the soul to remember and consider the things it already knows. Plato’s cave analogy in the Allegory has emphasized that learning is an exercise of detection of our own ignorance and transcending from it through proper use of reason.
questions (Mahiri, 2005, p. 82). When learning is equated with the passing of the test, the pedagogic goals are limited to the teaching the test. The test simply becomes the curriculum (Wraga, 1999, p. 3). Both teachers and students are like automatons who are participating in a mechanism like activity and this disregards the human potential for evolution and adaptation. The enjoyment of teaching and learning diminishes, and students, become passive vessels, initially empty but later on filled with specialized prescribed knowledge that gear them to be capitalist and paternal slaves in the future.

Furthermore, standardization and alignment of the curriculum for the sole purpose of national development and social efficiency professionalize teaching into a technical job that devalues the autonomy that teachers have in planning and implementing the curriculum. It contests the little academic freedom that teachers can exercise in the classroom. Teachers are treated like simple office clerks and technicians (Giroux & McLaren, 1986; Giroux, 2010; Mahiri, 2005). Lansman and Gorksi wrote,

"we believe that the overemphasis on test scores that has raised these teachers' concerns grows from a set of myths that are inconsistent with both research and common sense ... because of these misconceptions, our schools and curriculum are becoming increasingly standardized" (2007, p. 2).
Another point against standardization and narrowing of the curriculum is that it largely favors a monolithic content and a uniform method that place people of color in the absent center, margins or totally in the borderland\textsuperscript{12}. Hayes and Juarez (2012) argue that standardization is like taking their bodies (teachers and students of color, people who have English as their second language, special needs students, among many other minorities), into the spaces of the Other (referring to the white subject), and coming back to tell about the experience does not make them experts on the diversity or culture - it makes them people who visit the margins of whiteness and then return to the absent center (p. 8, words in parentheses mine). For example, in a multicultural society like Canada, while migration of different ethnic groups into the country are encouraged and implemented and as classrooms become more diverse, a standardized education system based on white, western, ethno/anglocentric values homogenizes the curriculum (Meaghan and Casas, 2004). It pushes for inequity as it ignores the diverse experiences of educators and students

\textsuperscript{12} Borderland consciousness is a term popularized by a Latina feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004). "A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (Anzaldúa 1987, 3).
of color. This supports the notion that schools, like standardized tests "are not 'neutral' or 'fair' or 'inevitable', but sites of economic, cultural and ideological domination, of class domination" (Hill, 2002, p. 10).

Furthermore, members of white corporate America that administers standardized examinations as well as British institutions which implement national level examinations in former colonies and countries which are still presently members of the Commonwealth, make significant profits in the creation of these tests (Kohn, 2000, p. 6).

The process of standardization also maintains some form of colonization that is neither accidental nor innocent. Coming from Asia and being an educator of color, standardization and patterning the curriculum from the

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Incidentally, as Canada’s population continues to become more racially diverse, it is expected that teacher diversity will become inevitable. However, from dated surveys, it is on the contrary. Moll (2001) indicates that the racialized teacher population is not keeping up with the racialized student and general populations. It is really way behind despite the richness of shared experiences that educators of color may offer (Solomon, 1997; National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004; The Toronto District School Board, 2007). In multicultural societies, equitable representation is certainly one of the main praxis in realization of social justice. One avenue to put equitable representation beyond theory is to counter marginalization of people of color in most influential positions, such as teaching. However, based on recent statistics and data, it seems that educators of color find many difficulties in entering the Canadian teaching profession. I assume that these teachers, generally internationally trained educators are mostly women of color (although I acknowledge that this is from a stereotypical mentality that teaching is a woman’s profession) who despite their prior teaching capabilities and qualifications, experience significant hurdles from acquiring teacher licenses, finding teaching jobs and permanent contracts from school boards.
learning experiences that are alien to me and my Asian students is like a perpetuation of not just economic but also intellectual slavery. If a democratic society believes that education is a greatest equalizer and meritocracy flourishes from equal educational opportunities, standardization and narrowing of the curriculum sabotage these purposes and any experiential knowledge that is within. It values “whiteness” over the rich, diverse cultural experience that people of color like me have.

For these reasons, I claim that education only for the sake of social efficiency and national development has little to do with social justice and does not demonstrate any sensitivity to gender, race, culture and individual differences. It minimizes the importance of experiences and diverse cultures. John Dewey (1998) argues that,

"no one would question that a child in a slum tenement has a different experience from that of a child in a cultured home; that the country has a different kind of experience from a city boy, or a boy on the seashore one different from the lad who is brought up in the prairies. Ordinarily, we take such facts for granted as too commonplace to record. But when their educational import is recognized, they indicate the second way in which direct the experience of the young without engaging in imposition. A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of shaping by actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how utilize the surroundings, physical and social that exist so as to
extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile” (p.35).

While the stated lengthy quote from Dewey did not mention about gender, race and cultural differences, one could take his view of individuality and diversity of people’s experiences as an inclusive element in the educational process. As experiences act as a foundation of what the students know, it decenters any dominant standardization process and diversity becomes “the standard” and a value in itself.

**Standards and Not Standardization: The Game of Values vis-à-vis Numbers**

Why standards are more significant than standardization? How do standards in democratic education systems and approaches resolve issues in education?

McNeil (2005) explained this logic, when he stated that:

“’Accountability’ sounds benign. It sounds like ‘responsibility.’ ‘Testing’ sounds educational. It brings to mind ‘achievement’ and ‘learning.’ ‘Standardization’ is very close to ‘standards.’ And haven’t we as a country (referring to the United States of America) been trying over the past two decades to raise academic standards?” (p. 57, words in parentheses mine).

However, by trying to raise academic standards by means of standardization and examination, educational methods have gone backwards and monotony in education has prevailed (Garrison, 2009). Instead of utilizing
standardization as a gauge of learning and seeing if the educational process taking place is largely effective, standardization has become the hallmark of bias that is itself a measure of failure of the implementation of teaching and learning in line with the real spirit or soul of education.

In equating standards with standardization, we reduce the educational process to a common denominator and we lower our expectations of education (Gee, 2001, p. 25). When we actually speak about standards in education, we are not talking about the numbers that quantify students based on the grades and output they produce from their test results, but essentially an education that is based on the values and even virtues, in the Aristotelian sense\textsuperscript{14}, wherein the real spirit of the educational process thrives.

\textsuperscript{14} While also concerned with the development of the community, Aristotle proposes education to be a tool for human flourishing. This can be achieved in both the ethical and political sense by doing what is good (or right) and emphasizing a balanced (or moderate) development. From this, we can view the Aristotle’s education method looks into all approaches and subjects – play, physical training, music, debate, and the study of science and philosophy, all subjects that develop the mind (or the soul) and the body. \textit{Eudaimonia} or human flourishing is a very important concept in Aristotle’s idea of life. However, for Aristotle, this conception of happiness must be in line with virtue and not deficient with it. For Aristotle, virtue is a kind of outlook or disposition that is learned and imbibed ever since a person is young. It must be cultivated in spirit like a habit. A person with virtue may not be swayed to do evil if he is confident in all instances and will do well at all times. \textit{Arête} or virtue for Aristotle is something that is cultivated at a young age. Becoming virtuous requires a steadiness and steadfastness, gaining excellence and a formation of habit or skill through constant practice and learning through experience.
Standards and values accommodate changes and open opportunities for plasticity that the educational processes create or reveal along the way. A public education system, especially if it is under the realms of a democratic society, must provide opportunities for students to be critically engaged and become autonomous agents (Giroux, 2009). It is to a great extent possible that there is no standardized practice but there are still standards supporting different approaches to education (Portelli & Vibert, 2013).

I contend that for standardization to be challenged, a steady social reform within the educational system should take place. I take social reform as a gradual change made by diverse groups of people, in order to bring public awareness and impact concerned government units in policy making and implementation. Believing that changes can transpire from within, in this research, I am proposing a challenge to standardization in schools by tapping into the individual person, the human potential to create communities of inquiry through which standards of democracy prevail. The real challenge to standardization is finding a way to learn by doing, by inquiring and through dialogue. And all these are essential elements of many democratic approaches to education.
In challenging standardization through the community of inquiry\textsuperscript{15} as a means of social reform, I aim to use diverse standards of democracy espoused by different philosophers/philosophies of education: Aquinas’ Connatural Learning, Dewey’s Educative and Reflective Experience, and Buber’s Dialogue.

\textbf{Research Problem}

Portelli and Vibert (2013) note that the argument in favor of standards in public education seems to be that if we had common universal standards then our quality of education would not be deteriorating and historically or racially marginalized students would have a greater chance of equally competing at schools. The assumption is that standardized tests will improve educational standards. Same authors insist that commonality in terms of universal standards will discredit the importance of differences which would be contrary to the spirit of democracy enlivened within education itself. Eisner (1993) warns us that we have to differentiate between standards as measurements and standards as values. The former is like a metric tool for the sense of practicality and political control of knowledge, while the latter is more about

\textsuperscript{15} Hereinafter, COI.
educational standards and the values that the students learn from the educational process itself.

Having faith in education as a process that is drawing from within and connecting with the world, I argue that classrooms and schools which practice standardization have not become a place where students are provided with connections and experiences that enable them to understand, learn and link with the environment, a process that cultivates their knowing-how and knowing-why. With the student life truncated from real life experiences, relationality or even the refinement of social virtues are consequently weakened. What does this imply for pedagogy or generally, the fields of teaching and learning? I reflect that with the absence of an experiential learning approach, connatural knowledge and dialogue between the teacher and the student, the culture of silence and tolerance is brought into the educational process. The deafening silence and tolerance instead of understanding may set aside the real purpose of education in developing the whole person - one that is relational and responsive to actualize a learning process in which ends or goals can also be diverse. I argue that education, both in theory and practice, must be a critical field where learning comes from questioning, discovery and flourishing with the vast
tapestry of life experiences and collaboration between the teacher and the student.

My research initially focuses on the problem of standardization in schools as a threat to democratic approaches to pedagogy that has been espoused by different philosophers/philosophies of education. I aim to explore the possibility of resolving this problem through the community of inquiry as a means of social reform. The community of inquiry that I propose is characterized by some standards of democracy: connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue.

Based on the above discussions there are several philosophical problems raised by the practice of standardization in schools. The problems cascade from the assumption that standardization will secure high quality education and can also practically be utilized as a springboard for equity and social justice in favor of marginalized students. However, the concept of high quality and outcomes based education that is imposed by a superior culture has the tendency (based on historical and political fact) to marginalize students who are not in the mainstream. Of course, some would say that the above observation and argument may be erroneous because it commits the fallacy of appeal to tradition. However, we may
realize that the practice of standardization in education presupposes a common culture that is universal which undermines diversity and sets aside the true spirit of education. It promotes not only an incisive competition among students but a deficit mentality in which difference means less. With these concerns posed, the study focuses on following research problems:

1. To what extent does the framework of the community of inquiry as social reform challenges standardization in schools?
2. To what extent do the standards of democracy through connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue, imbibed and embedded within the community of inquiry challenge standardization in schools?

**Significance of the Study**

For the significance of the study, I now turn on my own experience as a teacher in Singapore. It is my motivation and reflection to find resolutions on how the banking model of education, stimulated by standardization, may be eliminated. The main objective of my research is not just to find an alternative but to promote a means of social reform that is inclusive, progressive, and upholding social justice in education.
Apart from this, as noted in the main problems of this research, I aim to offer a philosophical foundation or conception of the needed reform given the problems posed by standardization in schools. A thorough discussion of an alternative form of curricula handling and learning process will hopefully inspire and implement a form of learning and educational process that is in line with the true nature of education and the spirit of standards as values.

Apart from its significance, the study also provides an original element by infusing different features of the community of inquiry as a means of social reform through different features of a democratic approach to pedagogy – connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue. I aim to utilize substantial philosophies of education that would realize the true spirit of the community of inquiry.

Perhaps that greatest contribution of this study to the field of philosophy of education is that I intend to bring together a variety of philosophers and weave their thoughts into a coherent framework, one that invigorates the community of inquiry as a challenge to standardization in education and as a means of social reform that can cultivate a seed of activism in favor of democracy and freedom in schools.
Structure of the Study

The first chapter of thesis relates to the introduction, research problem and significance of the study.

The second chapter presents the review of the problems associated with standardization in schools: mind-body dualism in traditional education and the use of education only as a tool for national development and social efficiency.

The third chapter discusses the characterization of the community of inquiry as a social reform in education. This chapter discusses the standards of democratic educational practice I am espousing: connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue.

The fourth chapter summarizes the discussions in the thesis and concludes with conceivable answers to the research problems given.
Chapter 2: Contextualizing the problem with Standardization

In my view, there are three greatest problems in contemporary educational theory and conventional ways of thinking about education. These problems greatly affect educational practices: (1) Mind-Body Dualism, (2) the use of education only as a tool or means for social and economic productivity and (3) standardization. The first two problems may be considered to be the major causes that results to the third one. And in entirety, these three problems intertwined results to the failure of any educational process to promote the true spirit of education and its purpose. The foregoing discussion about these problems gives some light as to why a means of social reform in education is necessary.

Mind-Body Dualism in Traditional Education

Education and curricula must not only focus on theoretical aspects but also on the effective and practical aspects of study. A student who has lived his or her life just merely using his reason and studying books might ask: What preparation my years in the classroom have given me for the practical life?
I would argue against the application of mind-body dualism promoted by Rene Descartes (1596-1650) into education.

Although Descartes has greater influences in other areas of knowledge such as science and mathematics, his authored work, *Discourse on Method* have been largely applied to education. In the first part of the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes begins with the idea that every man is rational. Following the Aristotelian concepts on the soul, Descartes asserts that men are rational animals and this makes us distinct from other lower animals. Descartes defines reason as good sense, the power of judging well and telling true from false. Capable of reasoning, men may have different ways in applying their rational faculty to particular subjects. The differences among men also exist because each man is actually considered a substance with a unique essence that is endowed with some accidents that develop randomly or by chance (DM, p. 1). With man’s rationality, his pure occupation is to search for the truth in the world – one that is acquired by a method that

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16 Hereinafter, DM.
Descartes has developed. This method is largely based on reason. Descartes notes that, “it is almost impossible that our judgments should be as unclouded and as well-grounded as they would have been if from the moment of our birth we have had the full use of our reason and had always been guided by it alone” (DM, p. 6). Descartes claims that our senses would often deceive us (DM, p. 14) and we must abandon all sensory knowledge that is gained from bodily experience. For Descartes, demonstration makes people err in their reasoning and imagination may just be considered illusions or dreams, far from reality. By this and through this, Descartes conceptualizes the predominance of reason and thinking which leads to several certitudes. The first one is that human beings are res cogitans or thinking things. Because man is capable of reasoning, his very identity, existence and difference lies on this capability. Thus, Descartes’ famous line, “I think, therefore, I am” (DM, p. 15). His argument is that, “the mere fact that I thought about doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed” (DM, p. 15)

The very individual who is capable thinking is a soul in itself, a mind that is distinct from a body. The body which involves itself with sensory experience and
demonstrative knowledge is less superior to this mind which is solely capable of thinking and reasoning. As Descartes places heavy emphasis on the primacy of reason, he created some forms of paradigm shift against the Aristotelian notion that there is nothing in the mind which does not pass through the senses and all knowledge is derived from the senses, abstraction and rationalization. Descartes believes that by reason alone, man may acquire knowledge that is true, clear and distinct.

By the use of reason alone, Descartes discourages any appeal to other’s sense-experience or authority. In the final part of the *Discourse on Method*, he mentions, “When I accept something, it is because reason has convinced me of it, not because it has already been said by someone else or because it hasn’t!” (DM, p. 30)

Although there were many advantages of pursuing the primacy of reason alone in the acquisition of knowledge, Descartes’ great belief on the mind-body dualism or dichotomy has greatly, positively or negatively, affected the field of education. As Descartes’ agenda is to place an emphasis on any knowledge that is derived from reason alone, he was still inclined to carry on with two assumptions embedded on the philosophies before him. These are: Aristotle’s characterization of the human soul as
rational and the Christian belief that there is gradation of beings (and the perfect being is in existence).

Through the hierarchy created by Descartes within his mind-body dualism, the concept has been transposed in school systems, more so in traditional education. The main advantage is that with the use of rational capacities, students are encouraged to think in ways they are certain of the knowledge they have arrived at. Descartes’ philosophy of education encourages students to believe that each one is capable of thinking and no one holds one, ultimate truth. On the other hand, if education and schooling are considered to be places for mental, cognitive exercises only, we are to plan and implement a curriculum that is always fragmented. An implication of using the mind-body dualism in a school system is that it puts a lot of emphasis and importance on examinable subjects like the sciences and mathematics. Any bodily activity which cultivates creativity and uniqueness, such as the arts, music or even sports, are set aside. Such a school system impacts the way the arts and physical education are treated as subjects that are inferior.

For me, the education of the body is as important as the education of the mind. There should be a reform on how traditional education systems and the curricula have been
divided. The Either-Or terms, generated by the mind-body dualism, according to Dewey, recognizes no intermediate possibilities (Dewey, *Experience and Education*\(^{19}\), p.1). Dewey believes that the Either-Or mentality only rests in theory. In reality, there is a ripping of theoretical opposites in any educational practice. In his critique against the view that considers experiences as being contrary to thinking, Dewey argues against the transposition of mind-body dualism in school systems, more so in traditional education (EE, p. 1-11). He contends that by believing that education and schooling are all about cognition and the use of our mental faculties, “the chief source of the problem in schools is that the teacher has often to spend the larger part of the time in suppressing bodily activities which take the mind away from its material ... a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest” (Dewey, *Experience and Thinking*\(^{20}\), p. 63). By so doing, a superior bearing is given to cognition and all intellectual activities in schools.

Mind-body dualism also proliferated how society looks into the division of labor – the skilled and the unskilled, the white collar and the blue collar, the superior and inferior worker, the mental worker vs. the hand-minded –

\(^{19}\) Hereinafter, EE.  
\(^{20}\) Hereinafter, ET.
all kinds of binary/dualistic views that put a hierarchy, a dominance of one over the other. Such an outlook reflects the traditional view of what education is and how curricula are divided. If education and learning are only for the nourishing of intellectual capacities of a human being and depriving him or her from developing his or her physical skills, then the whole rationale behind educating the human person is never to be accomplished. Because of the mind-body dualism practiced in traditional forms of education, there is no sufficient interaction between mental and physical work. To me, the human being who is a mere bookworm, whose mind is only developed, likewise degenerates; and the toiler who has no mental training also experiences the same.

Utilizing mind-body dualism within the educational process may definitely give rise to standardization and narrowing of curriculum in schools. The hierarchy posed by the dualism implies that schools have to measure what matters most, as in which areas of knowledge or parts of the curriculum are important and which areas matters least; and also who are the students who excel in the more important areas of the curriculum and who are the ones who do not excel (Kohn, 2000). With this, there is always a need for standardized testing. Ranking and comparisons
created by the either-or mentality derived from the mind-body dualism give rise to a single measure that decides the students’ fates, as well as limits the interpretation of knowledge and approaches to teaching.

**Education solely for Productivity**

Plato’s view of human nature and the self is rectified by the roles we play in a very socially structured society. It is through reason and ideas that we stand up and live the life that we are assigned to in our societies. Human life, for Plato, is certainly political and must be realized in an ideal society that is organized and socially effective. By the utilizing education only as an instrument for national development and social efficiency, there is now a crisis within education systems. Because of this, some schools are now devoid of developing the relational and moral aspects of child as well as there is a lack of equity, equality and justice in education.

I think most educational programs we have today are not avenues where students are provided ways to thrive within and from their own dispositions and values.

In many countries, education is funded by the state/government and they use education as a means for social engineering and economic productivity (Meier, 2002).
This distorts the essence and purpose of education and places more emphasis on what future financial gain a country can have in educating their children. Also, it sees children and students not as full human beings but as potential capital that are available for future state use.

As I look back to my own example, the Singapore educational framework sees its students as potential workers of different fields. The school curricula, therefore, must respond to the needs of the society in the most pragmatic way it can. On the one hand, education for national development and social efficiency promote the collective good. However, by submitting to this purpose, there is a great impact not just in educational realms, but more so, on the personal, political and cultural levels.

Social efficiency means either maintaining current status quo or changing and placing people into different socioeconomic levels in order to ensure a spread-out balance. This means that while the public benefits collectively from using education as a tool for national development and social efficiency, issues of equity, equality and social justice in education arise. Indeed, in this situation, education and schools replicate not only that the hierarchy that Descartes’ mind-body dualism has
created, but also other forms of stratification, such as standardization that decides for the fate of the students.

Furthermore, as standardization separates students into different groups to fill in different roles in the society, questions of social mobility and political equality would also be significant concerns. In this current unfair and capitalist world, the practice of standardization in education may duplicate the ongoing elitism where children of affluent families enjoy and inherit their parents’ wealth and position. And it also supports the absence of democratic equality that greatly affects migrants, students of color, even female students or special needs children.

**The Problem with Standardized Testing and Standardization**

Standardized testing has swelled and mutated, like a creature in one with those old horror movies, to the point that it now threatens to swallow our schools whole...The more we learn about standardized testing, particularly in its high-stakes incarnation, the more likely we are appalled. And the more we are appalled, the more inclined we will be able to do what is necessary to protect our children from this monster in our schools (Kohn, 2000: 1).

The word *standard* originated from the old French word *estandart* which means a banner fixed to a pole or spear and stuck in the ground upright. The etymology implies a non-comparative conception. However, the modern use of standard as a noun and an adjective, standard has become a measure
or an instrument by which accuracy of others through challenging one another is determined. Standardized tests are now considered to be markers of social value (Garrison, 2009, p. 29). It has become a basis of social distinction.

In my view, standardized testing and standardization cause many problems in the socioeconomic conditions of the state.

The most obvious problem is its effect on education as an institution. Exams are used as strategies to promote a traditional “back to basics” form of instruction or education. Often, the multiple choice type of exams used in standardized tests eliminates the need for critical and creative thinking (Harris, et.al, 2011). It promotes the banking method of education where the teacher is superior and the student is inferior and this makes many important abilities of the students, not recognized. The numerical form of assessing learning which appears to be scientific is really devoid of the true spirit of education. Also, in reality, classroom activities may not always be linear or quantifiable. While standardized testing apparently presents to be an objective measure of achievement, it does not actually prepare students for the real world or it does bear no resemblance to what people experience in the real world. The tests care only about whether the student got
the right answer, and right answers do not necessarily signal real understanding and wrong answers do not necessarily signal the absence of understanding (Kohn, 2000: 7 & 8).

Apart from its impact on education as an institution, standardized testing and standardization also create a psychological barrier to the students. Such practice may not inspire students to learn on their own and find their life experiences connected to what they study. In the long run, standardized tests and standardization breed the lack of intrinsic motivation and intellectual exploration. Also, in the psychological sense, standardization may never present objectivity as tests created by institutions administering them are also products of a subjective mind (Stewart, 2004, p. 177).

Corporations which manufacture and score the exams reap enormous profits (Kohn, 2000). These companies and even test or review centers sell teaching materials which are believed to raise scores. In the economic sense, standardization places a market value on learning and even teaching.

Standardization also brings in some forms of political control, a mechanism where public officials can impose their will on the schools. A perpetual practice of racial
and cultural bias is regarded - superior nations or countries from which the exams originate maintain superiority over third world countries. This may also eliminate the idea that education and learning are processes that come from within. It hinders the students from learning from within their own, local way of life, as we may know that no single measure should decide a student’s fate.

If not standardized testing, then what? Having enumerated the failures caused by standardization, I now turn into a possible resolution: a kind of educational process whereby learning is seen by the process of doing, inquiring and dialogue. I propose the practice of a community of inquiry (COI) as a social reform, as a challenge to standardization.

Why the community of inquiry? The word community is derived from the Latin word communitas, which is a combination of two Latin words, com which means with and munus which literally means “gift”. A community can be considered a group that celebrates the gift of presence, of fellowship with each other. On the other hand, the word inquiry implies a process of questioning, supporting knowledge through doing, designing and conducting, resolving questions, solving problems and coming up with
new questions and problems. While an answer is an important part of inquiry, the vital aspect is not having a fixed or closed answer as what we see in standardization. The importance is the process of inquiring itself from which participation, ‘in conversation with’ and continuous or even unpredicted flow of activities arises.

Through the community of inquiry model, the students demonstrate learning abilities not by tests, but by doing and partaking. Instead of relying on high pressure exams in order for the schools to know that the students learn, learning is seen as students and teachers collaborate with each other. The COI does not initially and spontaneously promote a hierarchy or dichotomy posed by the mind-body dualism. It does not also promote the stratification induced by education as a tool for national development and social efficiency framework; rather, it promotes the true spirit of education and democracy within the educational process. Given its character, the COI is one of the most effective means of social reform.
Chapter 3: The Community of Inquiry as a Social Reform: Standards of Democracy through Connatural Learning, Centrality of Experience and Dialogue

I understand social reform as a gradual change made by diverse groups of people, in order to bring public awareness and impact concerned government units in policy making and implementation. The COI is a group of people, teachers and students coming from different backgrounds, engaged in the process of teaching and learning from each other through the process of inquiring, doing and collaboration.

This chapter presents the development of a community of inquiry as a means of social reform, characterized by connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue. The COI is a learning schema that may be practiced within the educational context and I argue that its conceptual and theoretical framework gives a challenge to standardization and calls for a social reform. While I use and discuss different themes from the philosophies of education juxtaposed in this research to characterize the COI, it is through these philosophies that I also intend to contest the mind-body dualism practiced in traditional education as well as using education as a tool for national development and social efficiency.
Matthew Lipman (1922-2010), considered as the founder of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, from which the community of inquiry framework originates, describes:

“The phrase [community of inquiry] presumably coined by Charles Sanders Peirce, was originally restructured to practitioners of scientific inquiry, all of whom could be considered to form a community in that they were similarly dedicated to the use of like procedures in pursuit of identical goals. Since Pierce, however, the phrase has been broadened to include any kind of inquiry, whether scientific or non-scientific. Thus we can now speak of 'converting the classroom into a community of inquiry' in which students listen to each other with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions. A community of inquiry attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than be penned in by the boundary lines of existing disciplines. A dialogue that tries to confirm to logic, it moves forward indirectly like a boat tacking into the wind, but in the process its progress come to resemble that of thinking itself. Consequently, when this process is internalized or interjected by participants, they come to think in moves that resemble its procedures. They come to think as the process thinks. (Lipman, Thinking in Education, 2003, pp. 20-21).

The influence of pragmatism into Lipman’s conception of the community of inquiry is pervasive. The notion of the community of inquiry, while it started with Peirce, imbibes a lot of Deweyan conceptions of inquiry as a spine and backbone of education in a democratic society where each student, child, inquirer or participant is taken as persons and equal members of the inquiring community.
In the community of inquiry, the teacher and students work together and think together. While it is important for each member of the community to individually think, ‘thinking together’ is far more important because it cultivates the members’ engagement in an open-minded inquiry that is far more rigorous than a fixed public testing of knowledge as we see in standardization. The internationalization of inquiry that is shared by every member of the community of inquiry does not only uncover biases and mistakes on individual student’s thoughts, but also makes learning, understanding and knowledge-building as a social endeavor. As knowledge becomes socially constructed and alternatives are explored, the practice of standardization is ultimately challenged. The transmission of knowledge promoted by the COI is not from an expert to a student - inquirers gather together and they learn to think through and make sense of the issues by themselves.

As the COI may depend on its members’ equal opportunity to engage in the process of inquiry, participation in the community is sustained through a learning process that is neither fixed nor artificial. While the process of inquiry is the main activity, there is no standardized way of doing so. Learning takes place in a more natural environment. While the teacher acts as a
facilitator, the teacher does not define a right or wrong answer. Neither superior nor dominant, the teacher learns with the student. Thus, participation in the COI is sustained by the quality of the learning process that takes place among the students and the teachers. This is where Aquinas’ concept of connatural learning fits in.

Personal perspectives and assumptions of COI members underpin the discourses and processes of inquiry. With this, the different experiences of the COI members as unique individuals offer great insights to the dynamics of learning taking place. As the Deweyan notion of reflective and educative experience is considered central in the COI, there is no opportunity to contain and limit learning and the interpretation of knowledge—a situation that is seen within standardization and standardized testing.

As the community of inquiry develops, a climate for constant dialogue embraces potential conflict, perhaps with equity, integrity and justice. The use of Buber’s concept of dialogue not necessarily harmonize but at least, in a true sense, accommodate multiplicity and complex interrelationships embedded within any inquiry, educational process or as in life itself.
We shall now examine themes of connatural learning, reflective and educative experience and dialogue which are vital to the community of inquiry.

Aquinas' Connatural Learning

Even though Aquinas has only devoted one question in the *Summa Theologica*\(^{21}\) that pertains to the teacher, there are still relevant discussions on this vast volume that cover teaching and learning.

Aquinas’ views on education are certainly influenced by the Aristotelian concept of gradation of beings\(^{22}\). From the linear hierarchical order: perfect (Supreme Being) to the imperfect (man, animal and plants), Aquinas takes an image of education that is a circle of enlightenment that emanates from the perfect (*ST Vol. 1, Q. 89, Art. 1*). The perfect being is the source of everything, including truth and knowledge. Human beings, as the highest among imperfect beings have the ability to develop reason. By implication, this ontological hierarchy affects the activities of the created imperfect beings, including teaching and learning. In Aquinas’ discussion “On the Teacher” (*ST, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1*), his primary question is, “Can a human teach and be

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\(^{21}\) Hereinafter, *ST.*

called a teacher or just God alone?” Inevitably, Aquinas’ Christian Theology subscribes to the belief that God is the only teacher and human teachers are just instrumental, efficient causes. Although the role of the Supreme Being is central to teaching, nevertheless, Aquinas did not undermine the significance of human teaching as an efficient cause to gain knowledge. As teachers are humans, it inevitably follows that human teaching is deficient in some ways. In some ways, there is a positive stance to this: as teachers are not treated masters, rather they, as imperfect beings may also improve in the process. Also the concept of imperfection in human teaching requires the will of the student to learn. After all, Aquinas believes that it is not just the teacher who is the holder of knowledge, but the knowledge gained by the student is always in conformity with him as a knower to the known (ST, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1, Par. 7).²³

For Aquinas, knowledge is not innate and teaching inspires the human mind to know things. He argues against the Platonic view that teaching is nothing other than helping the soul to remember and consider the things it already knows. He does not submit to the notion that

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²³ This is the classical view of the elements of Epistemology: Subject as the knower, Object as the thing known and the process of knowing.
learning is only a matter of remembering or recollection (ST, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1, Par. 15)\textsuperscript{24}. If the latter was the case, the teacher’s job would be to help the students in remembering the innate knowledge and hasten their memorization skills all the time – and this is the very process that standardization upholds. However, I understand that for Aquinas, knowledge is constructed and considered subjective and we see and understand the world as we are and not as “they are”. Knowledge may depend on the student’s experience and this can be considered a direct link with Dewey’s notion of the centrality of experience in the acquisition of knowledge. Following the Aristotelian point of view, for Aquinas, sense-experience plays a very important role in the acquisition of knowledge, in learning and understanding. In fact, it is from sense-experience that abstraction and rationalization follow.

Aquinas claims that teachers are efficient causes\textsuperscript{25} of knowledge in as much as they facilitate learning by

\textsuperscript{24} If knowledge is innate, we are inclined to think that everything we need to do is to recollect this knowledge. See Meno in Cooper, John M. (ed.), 1997, Plato: Complete Works, Indianapolis: Hackett.

\textsuperscript{25} His concept of causes: material, formal, efficient and final were all taken from Aristotle. The material cause: “that out of which, formal cause: “the form”, “the account of what-it-is-to-be, efficient cause: “the primary source of the change or rest”, it is the instrumental cause, final cause: “the end, that for the sake of which a thing is done”, e.g., health is the end of walking, losing weight, purging, drugs, and surgical tools. See Hankinson, J. R., 1998, Cause
removing some impediments to actualize any knowledge. At the heart of this claim is the Aristotelian concept of the possibility of turning every potentiality to actuality. In this view, Aquinas may concede that there are some seeds of knowledge already present within humans but through facilitation, the mind moves into an actual state of knowing some more specific things. Only through this process, Aquinas asserts that someone can be said to have acquired knowledge (ST, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1, Par. 20). We may think that for Aquinas it is still a matter of acquiring knowledge rather than constructing or co-constructing knowledge. I personally think that this is to a certain extent consistent with the COI framework because there may be some members of the community who come from different backgrounds. Also, in the process of inquiry, there may be members who would take different roles: some would provide a possible answer, others would validate and some would clarify. While the discussion among the different inquirers takes place, knowledge acquired at some point may be reconsidered, re-constructed or even challenged.

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and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

26 Rationes seminales.
The bases of Aquinas’ philosophy of education and
connatural learning are discovery (inventio), the process
by which the human mind naturally understands things and
teaching (disciplina), the process by which another person
such as the teacher facilitates learning (ST, Vol.1, Q. 11,
Art. 1, Par. 25). He further elaborates that the student’s
ideas are the primary foundation on which is built all
knowledge gained through teaching and while the teacher
presents signs of knowable things, the student’s mind takes
ideas in order to consider them (+, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1,
Par. 32). The role of the teacher then is to inspire the
student to understand what is he or she is teaching and
becomes an efficient cause to actualize knowledge. In all
these processes, connatural learning transpires between the
teacher and the student.

Aquinas’ views are certainly in contrast with the
banking model of education. The learner that Aquinas
envisions is active and the teacher and the learner are
both involved in the process. The main agenda of
connatural learning is to preserve the notion that human
beings, teachers and students, are capable of rational and
intellectual exercises, and they have the agency and
creative powers to engage with the world. The teacher is
not a perfect entity that has to be considered a master and
whatever he or she says is right and true. The student is not a passive vessel into which knowledge is transferred. In connatural learning, reality and knowledge are something that we subjectively learn with other human knowers. I find Aquinas’ argument that knowledge which is in the teacher is not numerically the same with student (ST, Vol.1, Q. 11, Art. 1, Par. 25), very appropriate in criticizing standardization and quantification of the educational goals through examination results. Aquinas presents a progressive feature in his philosophy of education when he claims that knowledge gained by the student is not the same with the teacher’s knowledge, as he believes that knowledge can be common or shared but not totally the same. This is a reality that many education systems have not yet realized and so treating knowledge as the same for all may be one of the main reasons why some educational systems still utilize the banking model of education and standardization.

In Aquinas’ method of education, he certainly embraces a facilitation model of learning and understanding, from which experiences are central in the learning process. This is where I see the direct link between Aquinas and Dewey.

**Dewey’s Philosophy of Experience**

Dewey’s Philosophy of Education and Philosophy of Experience are discussed in several important works but
greatly expounded in his short book, *Experience and Education* (1938)\textsuperscript{27} and in a very short essay ‘Experience and Thinking\textsuperscript{28}’ (*Democracy and Education*, 1916, pp. 63-68).

Foremost, for Dewey, experience is essential for education to thrive. Dewey defines education in terms of experience: “It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, *Education as Conservative and Progressive in Democracy and Education*, 1916, p. 36). This implies that the whole process of education is about making sense of the experiences a student has and will have. By making sense of experiences and creating meaning out of these, the student engages himself to have control or direction over future experiences. In this light, I would claim that reflective and educative experience greatly impacts one’s capacity for empowerment and participation in the classroom. I take empowerment as the individual’s aptitude to enact choices and create his or her own experiences, readiness to accept the consequences of one’s experience, adapt to whatever change the consequences may bring and even stir an action that could itself be a change. Side by side with being enabled, comes the ability

\textsuperscript{27} Hereinafter referred to as *EE*.
\textsuperscript{28} Hereinafter referred to as *ET*.
to give what one has and that is an opportunity to participate in classrooms along with other inquirers.

**The Nature of Experience**

What does Dewey mean by experience? Departing from traditional empirical definitions of experience\(^{29}\), Dewey adopts experience as something that includes an active and passive element (\(ET\), p. 63). For Dewey, experience constitutes trying or experimenting which brings the active role of the learner; and secondly, experience may also mean reflexively going through the consequences of the learner’s actions. Having these two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of experience (\(ET\), p. 63). In Dewey’s terms, the whole of experience does not stop in making choices but it continues with living through the consequences. Dewey differentiates experiences from mere activity, for the latter may only mean a fragment of an action that disregards the effects of such action. Such dispersive character of activities may not allow one to learn true enough. For learning ultimately means, learning through experience: “to make backward and forward

\(^{29}\) Aristotle and the Empiricists categorized experience as sense-experience which is the source of any empirical knowledge. They looked into experience as limited to observation and experimentation. Aristotle, for equating experience with memory attributes a non-rational character in experience. When one remembers something, he may think, however, there is no critical or rational activity related to it.
connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things” (ET, p. 63).

By bringing the active-passive phases of experience, Dewey believes that experiences involve cognition. Cognition or thinking is necessary in order to make sense of the present experience, form connections with other experiences and recognize meanings. Dewey says that “no experience having a meaning is possible without thought” (ET, p. 65). However, by limiting experiences within the cognitive level, this brings isolation, in which eventually, meanings formed are broken.

Critique against Traditional Education and the role of Experience

In an attempt to find a better-quality education in all aspects, Dewey is thoughtful about the inadequacies of traditional education.

He opens Experience and Education by claiming that, just like most philosophies in the ancient to modern eras, dualism and theoretical opposites proliferate in the history of education. The Either-Or terms, according to Dewey, recognize no intermediate possibilities (EE, p. 1). Dewey believes that Either-Or only rests in theory. In reality, there is a ripping of theoretical opposites in any educational practice.
In his critique against the taking experiences contra thinking, Dewey argues against transposition of mind-body dualism in school systems, more so in traditional education (EE, pp. 1-11). He says that by believing that education and schooling are all about cognition and the use of our mental faculties,

“the chief source of the problem in schools is that the teacher has often to spend the larger part of the time in suppressing bodily activities which take the mind away from its material...a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest” (ET, p. 63).

Dewey notes in ‘The School and Society’ (Dewey on Education, 1959, pp. 33-90) that any waste in education is a result of isolation. Teaching in isolation, in all aspects, does not prepare students for real-world experiences (EE, p. 48). In traditional education, the subject matter learned is always in taught isolation, in a water-tight compartment (EE, p. 48).

Standardized examinations best exemplify and support Dewey’s argument against the cascading effect of mind-body dualism in school systems. The mechanism is to ‘withdraw’ whatever one has learned through rote in years of school. The teaching method and pattern of intensive revisions before the exams are based on a mechanism-like activity that promotes uniformity. The students are like robots and
not humans, as emphasis is placed on a socially engineered form of education.

Dewey believes that for education not to be taught in isolation, educators must return to the intellectual methods and alternatively, to use the scientific method as a pattern and ideal of intelligent exploration of potentialities inherent in experience (EE, p. 108). I believe that the incorporation of the scientific method for educational and real experiments realizes the etymological origins of experiments and experiences, which are in themselves characterized by ‘trying, by doing, by conducting’. As Karl Popper (1902-1994), a modern philosopher of science would put, “what makes science science is its falsifiability” (Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, 1963). Dewey’s concept of experiments and experiences as falsifiable make these contingent. The inconclusive and temporal nature of the scientific method and the provisional nature of conclusions cultivate no end in inquiry. I believe this is the best way to render human experience as reflective and educative, a thoughtful process where one learns more from undergoing the process over again, rather than claiming a fixed answer.
Reflective Experience

Dewey’s departure from Aristotle’s empirical treatment of experience is seen in his notion of reflective experience. Dewey believes that experiences are neither limited to the empirical nor the rational. Both are, however, necessary in order to make sense of experiences.

He begins by characterizing life’s experiences as a matter of trial and error: a cut and try phase (ET, p. 65). Generally, when we do something, we try as much as we can to hit upon something which works and by this we adopt the method employed for subsequent procedures. Note that Dewey has brought in the pragmatic method in explaining the role of thought to experience. In discovering connections, the thought or reflection implied in the trial and error phase is made explicit. As we go through various experiences and change our procedures by finding new connections, tailoring some connections in future procedures and developing a unified connection, we gain a reflective type of experience in which thinking becomes elemental. Thinking is like an anchor - “it is the intentional endeavor to discover the connection between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous” (ET, pp. 65-66). To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings
which are the capital stock for intelligent dealings with further experiences (EE, p. 110).

By reflection, in order for one to exercise agency, one must engage in thinking in order to find meaning in his or her life experiences and eventually make choices out of this. By encouraging one to develop reflective experiences, Dewey’s concept certainly empowers, and in fact, the inwardness and outwardness, the insightful connections made, gear toward some forms of empowerment through experience and education. Learning from experience and reflecting through it create an avenue for the strong possibility of free choice and in the creation of future decisions.

**Educative Experience**

Dewey’s notion of educative experience is guided by the principles of continuity and interaction.

Experience does not simply come from the inside of the person; it also depends on external conditions (EE, p. 33). Interaction interprets an experience in its educational function and force. It assigns equal right to both factors in experience - objective and internal conditions (EE, p. 39). This means that the individual lives in a world means that they live in a series of situations. The concept of
situation and interaction are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of the transaction taking place between an individual...and his or her environment (EE, p. 41). Educative experiences arise when we make connections between the internal and the external, between the subjective and objective and relating these connections further beyond.

However, Dewey cautions that not all experiences necessarily have an educative character (EE, pp. 12-13). He characterizes mis-educative experiences as lacking in responsiveness in making one integrate his or her learning with other experiences. A mis-educative experience distorts the growth\(^{30}\) of the learner. One of which is habituation – a given experience that develops a person’s automatic skill but does not allow him to use considerable thought\(^{31}\). An enjoyable experience which only settles for

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\(^{30}\) Dewey considers education as growth. By doing so, he means that education is a way to growth but these terms can be seen as one and the same. These processes involve an active sense of control to achieve ends. See Dewey, J. (1916). Education as Growth in Democracy and Education. New York: Macmillan Company, pp. 20-27.

\(^{31}\) Dewey considers habits as expressions of growth. Habit is the formation of a skill and the efficiency of doing. Habits are different from habituation or routine and unthinking habits. Habits are like tokens of growth, through which a person does not merely adapt but transforms his environment. By further explaining, Dewey gives a differentiation between a savaged man and a civilized man. The savaged man when confronted with a situation adapts himself and learns to live with the present conditions even if it means he is suffering or enslaved; the civilized man also adapts but adds something more by making choices, decisions and taking an active part to apply his own intellectual dispositions. Dewey notes that the exercise of habits is always taking place within a cognitive experience and not devoid of
the emotion and lack of a careful reflection can also be mis-educative. Everyone would have several experiences everyday but those experiences lacking in thought and connection in order to form meanings do not impact a person’s educative growth and learning. In Dewey’s terms, these are wrong and defective experiences (EE, p. 16).

In selecting experiences, educators must develop a curriculum that reflects upon the experiential continuum, a principle which deals with an attempt to discriminate between experiences which are educationally worthwhile and those which are not (EE, p. 24). Thus, the challenge now is to root experience in the curricula or subject-matter.

**Rooting ‘Experience’ in the Crowded Curricula**

Dewey engages in an educational philosophy that promotes both an inward and outward development and formation. The traditional scheme is one of imposition from above and from outside (EE, p. 4). It instantly assumes that what has happened in the past will likely occur in the present or the future. It disregards change and forbids an active participation of the young to what is being taught. Consequently, since everything that the

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student will learn has been written in the textbooks and transmitted by teachers, there is no room from learning through the experiences. By giving importance to the student’s individuality and experiences, Dewey’s strong assumption is that there is an intimate and necessary relationship between experience and education (EE, pp. 7, 12). He ascertains that progressive education must utilize the correct idea of experience.

By utilizing every day experiences, Dewey argues that progressive education is more humane and human compared to traditional education (EE, p. 24). Basing education upon personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the educators and students, something that never existed in the traditional school (EE, p. 8).

In further commenting about the curriculum as conceived from the traditional perspective, Dewey notes that the subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past and since this is so, the attitude the students take is one that is of docility, receptivity and obedience (EE, pp. 2-3). In this circumstance, an impediment is created against thinking and freedom.
In the age where teaching concentrates on the passing of information rather than the acquisition of knowledge, the crowded curricula may not be encouraging enough for students to make sense of. It creates a great gap that the required subject-matter, the method of learning and of behaving, is alienating to the students themselves. What is being taught is seen as finished products where students can no longer assimilate their own experiences. Dewey resolves this by looking into a form of education that emphasizes individuality, free activity, and experience. Dewey believes that progressive education links experience and education and by this there are more intimate contacts between the mature and immature\footnote{Dewey uses the term immature or immaturity in a positive stance. For growth to take place, Dewey believes that immaturity must first be present and acknowledged. The necessity and inevitability of growth is brought about by a stage of being undeveloped. In this case, he thought that immaturity, although it has contemporary undesirable connotation, is a springboard towards something better. An immature entity has a lot of room to exercise capacity and realize potentialities. Some have regarded the concept of immaturity as negative. Dewey explained that if we take the concept of immaturity comparatively (i.e. the man is mature and the child is immature - accounting for the gap, seeing a lack of or even pushing for superiority of one over the other), we do not consider the intrinsic side of immaturity, which is the opportunity to cultivate, nurture and progress. Looking into the encouraging aspects of immaturity, one may also see the value of a child initially being juvenile: dependent yet flexible towards growth and learning. See Dewey, J. (1916) Education as Growth in Democracy and Education. New York: Macmillan Company, pp. 20-27.}, closing the gap that has been usually created in traditional schools. The use of theory of experience is \textit{conditio sine qua non} for the students to become acquainted with the past and make this
acquaintance as a potent agent in appreciation of the living present.

What do these considerations mean in the context of formal education? How do they translate, in particular, into the teacher’s approach to subject matter? In a passage from 'The Child and the Curriculum'\(^\text{33}\) (Dewey on Education, 1959: pp. 91-111), Dewey draws upon the connection between experience and education so that the teacher views the classroom subject-matter “as representing a given stage or phase of the development of experience” (CC, pp. 92-93). This means seeing the subject-matter in connection with the child’s experience and as provoking an appropriate series of efforts on the part of students and which are likely to have readily intelligible consequences that make each episode meaningful. He says of the teacher:

“His problem is that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing. Hence, what concerns him, as teacher, is the ways in which that subject may become a part of experience; what there is in the child’s present that is usable with reference to it; how such elements are to be used; how his own knowledge of the subject-matter may assist in interpreting the child’s needs and doings, and determine the medium in which the child should be placed in order that his growth may be properly directed. He is concerned, not with the subject-matter as such, but with the subject-matter as a related factor in a total growing experience” (CC, p. 105).

\(^\text{33}\) Hereinafter, CC.
The educator should then select in the range of existing experiences that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience (EE, p. 90). This is imperative in curriculum planning and development.

The immediate problem of education or the educator is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences for unless experience is central to the planning of the subject-matter; otherwise, the curriculum is wholly in the air (EE, p. 17). Responsibility for selecting objective conditions carries with it the responsibility for the understanding of the needs and capacities of the individuals who are learning at a given time (EE, p. 45). This implies that any curriculum based on experience must not be a cookie cutter. I know that this is still a challenge in many school systems. For one, basing education on experience may mean doing away with standardized examinations. The focus of education becomes how the child can meaningfully connect his or her own life experiences and make them educative in nature. The capacity for reflection is in fact very dynamic, making education devices of the old tradition totally ineffective. Also,
with the use of experience as core epistemology and a strong basis for education, learning may be too individual at some point. This really challenges the roles of educators or teachers in both the administrative and pedagogic aspects.

However, such challenge for educators maybe resolved by implementing the concept of the community of inquiry. As power in the classrooms is decentered – not in the hands of the teacher or a few, we need the community where every student or child will be part of.

Most children, in their young ages are full of questions and ideas, they wonder about everything. Infusing their own reflective and educative experiences within the curricula, the children learn to master procedures in education with natural internalization and dialogue through the community of inquiry.

By use of Dewey’s concepts of experience that are reflective and educative, we move away from studying closed questions in the classroom and from settling with fixed knowledge that can be examinable but less thoughtful and humane?. Through the process of reconstruction and reorganization of experiences, we give avenues for open questions and the search for knowledge that is based on inquiry, exploration and reasoning. Once this scheme has
been put into place, we can certainly argue that Dewey’s theoretical espousal on the nature of experiences would provide a ‘fluid structure’ for the use of the community of inquiry as a democratic approach to pedagogy.

**Common elements between Aquinas and Dewey**

There are many points of intersections between Aquinas’ and Dewey’s philosophies of education.

Experience as central to learning is the first intersection in these two philosophies. While Aquinas’ notion of sense-experience is very simple compared to Dewey’s concept of educative experience, I consider both to serve similar purposes of being the instrument for real, natural individual and not mechanical learning to take place. Sense-experience promotes awareness at the very basic level and from this abstraction and rationalization occur. It connects with other ways of knowing, such as emotions derived from experience, intuition or even faith, in order to gain knowledge. In Dewey’s notion of experience, a complex process is even more developed once we link experiences and make them educative. Dewey adopts experience as something that includes an active and passive element. For Dewey, experience constitutes trying or experimenting which brings the active role of the learner; and secondly, experience may also mean reflexively going
through the consequences of the learner’s actions. By bringing the active-passive phases of experience, Dewey believes that experiences involve cognition. Cognition or thinking is necessary in order to make sense of the present experience, form connections with other experiences and recognize meanings.

Aquinas and Dewey both realize that the teacher and student are both active in the learning process. Challenging the traditional classroom setting that the teacher is superior and active and the student is inferior and passive, Aquinas and Dewey believe that the teacher and the student are neither dominating nor opposed to each other. They are both participants in the learning process. The educative process in both these philosophies draw a careful reflection on the role of teachers in the facilitation and formation of the kind of togetherness, a volitionally accepted and willed relationship between teacher and student amidst the reality of great difference. The act of inclusion is also promoted in both these philosophies, by acknowledging and knowing that there is great uniqueness between the teacher and the student, or among the students, even if one will not ever fully understand what this great uniqueness is all about.
The concepts of potentiality and actuality are very central to Aquinas’ and Dewey’s philosophies of education. This is a common ground between Aquinas and Dewey that is Aristotelian. In this age, so many psychological theories objectify and treat human capacities and potentialities as developed on a monolithic and linear sense. In reality the totality of man’s nature can be explained holistically in a sense of relationality. Education is an enterprise of a series of relational experiences through which human potentiality is ultimately fulfilled. If education is solely based on actualizing potentialities or celebrating freedom for self-growth, the child is prepared nonetheless for a very painful solitary human existence. The main function of education then is to encourage student’s growth that is enlivened and fulfilled by his or her relationships with the world and with the community of inquiry. And for Aquinas and Dewey, the child’s growth is about the development of his or her creative powers as he or she engages with his or her world, sharing in an undertaking and entering into mutuality. Also, every potentiality can be developed and actualized differently. There is the presence of separate and different identities of human beings, teachers and students, which probably might be the reason why Aquinas and Dewey think that collectivism in
education can only be implemented to some extent. *Difference does not mean less*, and with this concept, both Aquinas and Dewey bring in respectful mutuality that cultivates a subject to subject relationship, between the teacher and the student, or among the students as unique individual inquirers.

This brings me to the last intersection – dialogue. For both Aquinas and Dewey, individuality is acquired through social interaction and social progress. As both have utilized the concept of potentiality to actuality that are vital for the capacity of ones’ development, the individual as a member of the community learns, grows and shapes through dialogue and interaction with the other. This presents a definite social relationship that promotes respect and value cultivated by a series of dialogue with another part or member of the community, be it the community of inquiry or any social group. This is where the close connection of Buber’s conception of dialogue between two persons or among the community links with the way Aquinas and Dewey idealize the human person as a learner and the community of learners as composed of partners in dialogue.
Buber’s Concept of Dialogue

“Between” maybe considered a very common word and not even a significant one in the English lexicon. As an old English word, the preposition or adverb between is etymologically derived from *betweonum* which means among the two or by turns. As such, we can infer that *between* may create an abyss as it separates two distinct entities or objects. On the other hand, the state *between* can be also be considered a conduit for worthy connections.

Martin Buber (1878-1965), in his attempt to go beyond individualism and collectivism in teaching and learning, maintains an alternative that makes *between*, a necessary and sufficient condition for real relations between the teacher and student to take place. In *Between Man and Man* (1947), Buber claims that “on the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge where *I* and *Thou*\(^\text{34}\) meet, there is the realm of

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\(^\text{34}\) Buber’s monumental work, *I and Thou* (1937) exposes the philosophy that constitutes all of his writings. For Buber, there are two modes in which man engages himself with the world: the *I-It* and the *I-Thou*. *I-It* presents a situation where man is an observer of his world. Man is merely a spectator of his world rather than a participant. In this regard, man in the *I-It* relations also sees the things or entities around him as mere objects of knowledge. The second mode, *I-Thou* is not just requiring an element of participation, but a revelation. It reveals man’s ability to take part in his world, more in the tune of relationality and mutuality, which verifies his own existence. In man’s encounter within the realms of the *I-Thou* mode, man transforms a relation between his fellow men. The *I* sees the *Thou* as not just as a mere object but as somebody worthy of a being subject or a self that may have an incomprehensible identity like the *I*. Once the *I* starts analyzing the *Thou* as an object of knowledge, the *Thou* is
'between'. This reality, whose disclosure has begun in our time, shows the way, leading beyond individualism and collectivism, for the life of future generations…” (p. 243). Aside from being a narrow bridge that is not very easy to stride on, Buber characterizes 'between' as a reality that exists between man and man and can only be fathomed once men actualize “a real conversation...a real lesson...a real embrace... [or even] a real duel, all these reconstituted in accordance with men’s meeting with one another” (p. 241).

Buber sees education as essentially a dialogue conducted between teacher and student... and something that is concerned with nurturing hope and a meaning giving faith (Murphy, 1988, p. 11). Buber’s simplest definition of interhuman dialogue is the sense of active responsible contact that can give rise to full reciprocity (Buber, 1973, pp. 22-23). Any encounter that does not designate dialogue is not considered a real meeting between human beings; it is a *mismeeting or miscounter*, in Buber’s terms. Buber further elaborates what he means by dialogue

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transmuted to the *It*. The *I-Thou* relationship is not a dimension of the self but it is a reality in which the self comes into being and by which the self is fulfilled.

Buber’s concept of *mismeeting or miscounter* is conceptualized from his unrealized relationship with his mother, as she left him when he was three years old. From this early experience, Buber sets in his lifelong preoccupation on the concept of human mutuality.
by saying that it only occurs in the I and Thou mode of existence, that of ‘experiencing the other side’ of the relationship. For a dialogue to transpire, Buber attempts to put forth the significance of the ontological reality of and the true actuality of the spirit of between, the narrow bridge that human beings must trail in order to see the Other as Thou.

He argues that education has been crowded by the psychological theories that objectify and treat human capacities and potentialities as developed on its own, while in reality the totality of a human being’s nature can be explained holistically in a sense of relationality. To a large extent, Buber’s philosophizing is an attempt to see “man” in his wholeness and totality and not in isolation that bars his relatedness to the world. While earlier western philosophies recognized man’s identity in terms of egology and theorizes about the self, the individual and human reason alone, Buber sees beyond this, and claims that relationships constitute that reality of man’s existence. By utilizing a much grounded philosophical anthropology and ethics, the fragmentation of man to his own humanity and humanness is dissolved. Buber quotes Feuerbach in further explaining this belief,
“the individual man for himself does not have man’s being in himself. Man’s being is contained only in community, in the unity of man with man – a unity which rests, however, only in the reality of the difference between I and Thou” (Friedman, 1964, pp. 50-53).

By this, Buber is clear with the presence of separate and different identities of men, which probably might be the reason why he thinks that collectivism in education can only be implemented to some extent. However, for Buber, similar to Aquinas and Dewey, difference does not mean less, and with this he brings in the concept of respectful mutuality that cultivates a subject to subject relationship, between man and man, the I and Thou for which between is an elemental bridge.

In his early years as a writer and educator, Buber preoccupied himself with the nature of relationship between the teacher and the student, the challenges that individualism and collectivism in education bring and the possibility of mutuality amidst the great divide in education. For Buber, “education is not the relation of the older to the younger generation; rather it is about the readiness for opening up of the brother-soul of each human being...a great attempt, touching all aspects of human

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36 In 1919, Buber, along with other two German educators, Rotten and Wilker, founded the pedagogic journal, Das Werdende Zeitalter, the main objective was to examine the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the pupil (Martin, 1988, pp. 26-27).
togetherness, to establish a decisively changed relationship of man to man” (Friedman, 1982, p. 279). Such hearty definition of education draws a careful reflection on the role of teachers in the facilitation of dialogue within a community of learners. “Between is characterized in more or less degree by the element of inclusion despite uniqueness of each one, [and this] maybe termed dialogical relation” (Buber, 1947, p. 115). In the encounter with the Other, the ethical significance of such is far more important than analyzing what is this Other.

In his essay “On National Education” (1963, pp. 149-150), Buber discusses the problems with each major educational thought: the classical traditional and the modern progressive. He compares the teacher in traditional schools to a sculptor who shapes the child and realizes the child as a material. The teacher as sculptor regards his student as a creature with diverse potentialities and has more than enough plasticity to submit to the active role of the teacher in molding the student. The teacher as sculptor brings in external conditions and factors to make the child realize his potential. The second type of teacher, the gardener, is more humble and passive, yet has less confidence. The teacher is like a gardener that cultivates the soil, plants the seed, nurtures the plant
and prunes it to a limited extent. After he or she has done this, he or she trusts the plant’s natural growth for it to develop its own potential; the teacher as gardener draws out of the child what is already in him or her. Both forms of education present an individualistic approach which breeds solitariness and do not convey avenues for relationality as the teacher’s roles and student’s characters have already been fixed and conceptually formed. Buber elucidates that classical traditional theory of education is characterized by too much authority given to the teacher, and the modern progressive theory of education leans more on freedom and child-centeredness (1947, p.115). For Buber, education is an enterprise of a series of relational experiences through which human potentiality is ultimately fulfilled, the same philosophies that Aquinas and Dewey are espousing. The main function of education then is to encourage student’s growth that is enlivened and fulfilled by his or her relationships with the world. And for Buber the child’s growth is about the development of his or her creative powers as he or she engages with his or her world, sharing in an undertaking and entering into mutuality.

Should Buber be asked to comment about competitiveness in present education systems, standardization in education
and academic excellence in terms of high grades and marks, I strongly feel that he would argue against it. Buber claims that when children and students are encouraged to accept the encounter, when they cross the narrow bridge of between, to look into the process of education rather than the products of learning, humility enters into them - “he [the student] grasps his hand not as a creator but a fellow-creature lost in the world, to be with his comrade or lover beyond the arts...have an awareness and a share of mutuality” (1947, p. 103).

Buber believes the Biblical injunction, “Thou shall not kill” (Friedman, 1982, pp. 356ff), considering killing or murder is the ultimate form of violence. Such challenging yet nonviolent relations between the self and the Other gearing towards a characterization of an ethical subject, presents a suitable paradigm for the interests of education in many ways.

For one, the idea of openness with and welcoming the Other can be extended to the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the student. This exactly aligns with Buber’s critique of classical traditional education where he criticized the earlier view that knowledge and truth are latent in the mind, and all the teacher has to do is to be a sculptor to bring these out. While Buber does
not explicitly discuss the specific content of learning, he
gives more importance on the ethical relationality and
diversity that transpire between man and man, between self
and the Other, between the teacher and the student, and
among the students. Sameness resounds in many areas of the
curricula taught in schools, even today. In fact, the very
idea of sameness or repetition is the ground for some
schools, teachers and educational systems to grade their
students in terms of privation and through examinations
that assess students in terms of rote learning. The
teaching method and pattern of intensive revisions before
the exams are based on a mechanism-like activity that
promotes sameness or uniformity. The students are like
robots and not humans.

I think that Buber’s philosophy of education can be
put into practice even with younger students as they are
initially taught about dialogue, mutual response and
responsibility. A direct application that I can think of is
intertwining Buber’s philosophy of dialogue with the
An exposition of the relevant points of view and exchange
of ideas take place in the Community of Inquiry. As every
inquirer or student comes from diverse backgrounds, this
unavoidably presents multi-perspectives brought into the
discussion. This is where the virtue of respect for others and their beliefs must be nurtured. By using Buber’s Philosophy of Dialogue, the community of inquiry maybe considered a safe place to take risks and respond to objections in a more polite and meaningful way.

An Encounter Between: Challenging the institutional role of teaching and learning

The use of between as a meaningful concept to direct the relation opens to a real and humane teacher-student relation. On the one hand, it pleads for education systems to view students mutually worthy and does not gauge students by what they can or what they cannot do, not by what they know or what they do not know and of course, not by what they have and what they do not have, rather by means of how the students are able to relate with respect, mutuality and nonviolence despite difference. On the other hand, such appealing schema also poses a challenge to the role of teachers and the institutional role of teaching.

For one, the teacher does not present himself or herself as the master, sculptor or gardener. He is a facilitator of relations, a helper as the students cross the narrow bridge of between or more so, a self that opens to the unknowable outside of him or her and that learns
from the Other, his or her students. As the teacher becomes the ethical subject par excellence, there can be hostile implications of this concept towards the institutional role of teaching. The openness within the conversation between teacher and student, and the acceptance of the reality of the teacher being taught by the Other, his or her student, would mean challenging universal and cultural notions about what a teacher is. While the teacher may virtuously employ humility on his or her part to participate in this relation, cultural acceptability of this relation may pose a challenge (and even a threat) for reformation in state education systems.

Secondly, Buber’s philosophy may apparently require the virtue of reverence to be distinctive and present in the Other, the students in order for either mutuality or nonviolence to take place. I surmise that Buber thinks that human nature is good. While this is idyllic, I construe that it takes a lot of process for this universal human nature to transpire and be utilized in the process of crossing between and partaking in the encounter that Buber advocates. Apart from realizing human nature, readiness in each teacher and student, or even among students, is a crucial element.
Finally, learning and measures of it, if at all it can be measured, are dependent upon the will of the self to approach the Other in conversation and to establish a decisively changed relationship of man to man. This may be way too challenging for education and even when attained, too provisional to maintain as difference and alterity are in constant play with the relationship.

Those three points bring me to the concerns I have about the identity-building of teacher and students as I use dialogue as an important element in the community of inquiry. While I think Buber’s philosophy based on relationality is a humble approach, I think constant dynamism taking place in such relations can always regard vulnerability. How would this affect epistemic security and identities of teachers and students?

While it may be good to realize an identity that is not born out of negation of the Other, the inconstancy of relationally-dependent identity can be an issue in terms of epistemic security. Who is the teacher? Who are the students? Can teachers be students and students be teachers? If we follow Buber’s scheme and apply it into the community of inquiry education, there is an evident shifting of roles and identities between teachers and students. This also has an impact on the formation of
knowledge, since I assume that epistemic security arising from self-knowledge maybe necessary to know other things beyond the self.

Buber’s philosophy can also be more applicable with a classroom or educational setting where the teacher and the students are mature to adapt to a kind of environment where relationality is more important in learning rather than focus on the products of learning. It applies more to situations where the object of learning is not about competition or getting good grades, but one that is about sharing of ideas and learning from this process.

Buber’s philosophy certainly forgoes the either-or theories in education, the fixed active (teacher) and passive (student) identities, and the hierarchical status between the dominant person and the dependent partner that promotes a great divide between teachers and students.

It may be easy to define the conditions of Buber’s philosophy of education – partners in dialogue and the respective free choice of self and the Other to enter into the conversation. While I think that these conditions are not insurmountable in the field of education, it may initially contrast with the students’ dependency on the teacher, an ideal that has been brought forward by many generations and influenced by cultures. Should Buber’s
philosophy of education be put into practice, an implication also affects the development of curriculum to take into consideration the choice and points of view of students. This poses some challenge with the curricula in the natural and exact sciences as well as mathematics. It also opens education to an atmosphere of liberty as required by genuine dialogue which some cultures and states where paternal religious education is still being practiced.

Ultimately, being a teacher myself, I truthfully hear and feel Buber’s provocation. When the teacher intentionally chooses to partake in the encounter between, he does not only reshape the nature of the teacher and student relationship, but he, although maybe uncomfortable and vulnerable, gives way to a knowledge that will help bring about the genuine person, again and to establish a genuine community (Buber, 1947, p. 243). As the teacher becomes an ethical subject, a self who desires and is unconditionally responsible to the Other, any asymmetric relations in education is altered and brought to a new phase, one that is of genuine interchange, a relationship of friendship or even love. This then, ultimately, puts the teacher’s vocation in its right path.
Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusion

There are many points of intersections between Aquinas’, Dewey’s and Buber’s philosophies of education. I intend to highlight four main intersections that would be greatly relevant into my introductory reflections as well as what I propose as a way forward: the community of inquiry.

Experience as central to learning. While Aquinas’ notion of sense-experience is very simple compared to Dewey’s concept of educative experience, I consider both to serve similar purposes of being the instrument for real, natural individual and not mechanical learning to take place. Sense-experience promotes awareness at the very basic level and from this abstraction and rationalization occur. It connects with other modes of thinking in order to gain knowledge. In Dewey’s notion of experience, a complex process is even more developed once we link experiences and make them educative. Dewey adopts experience as something that includes an active and passive element. For Dewey, experience constitutes trying or experimenting which brings the active role of the learner; and secondly, experience may also mean reflexively going through the consequences of the learner’s actions. By bringing the active-passive
phases of experience, Dewey believes that experiences involve cognition. Cognition or thinking is necessary in order to make sense of the present experience, form connections with other experiences and recognize meanings. Buber’s conception of individual experience as paramount and significant in relations between man and man, also takes human experience as central to dialogue and in learning.

The teacher and student are both active in the learning process. Challenging the traditional classroom setting that the teacher is superior and active and the student is inferior and passive, Aquinas, Dewey and Buber believe that the teacher and the student are neither dominating nor opposed to each other. They are both participants in the learning process. The educative process in both these philosophies draw a careful reflection on the role of teachers in the facilitation and formation of the kind of togetherness, a volitionally accepted and willed relationship between teacher and student amidst the reality of great difference. The act of inclusion is also promoted in both these philosophies, by acknowledging and knowing that there is great uniqueness between the teacher and the student, even if one will not ever fully understand what this great uniqueness is all about.
The concepts of potentiality and actuality. This is a common ground between Aquinas and Dewey that is Aristotelian, but it may also be evident with Buber’s Philosophy. In this age, so many psychological theories objectify and treat human capacities and potentialities as developed on a monolithic and linear sense. In reality the totality of man’s nature can be explained holistically in a sense of relationality. Education is an enterprise of a series of relational experiences through which human potentiality is ultimately fulfilled. If education is solely based on actualizing potentialities or celebrating freedom for self-growth, the child is prepared nonetheless for a very painful solitary human existence. The main function of education then is to encourage student’s growth that is enlivened and fulfilled by his relationships with the world. The child’s growth is about the development of his creative powers as he engages with his world, sharing in an undertaking and entering into mutuality. Also, every potentiality can be developed and actualized differently. There is the presence of separate and different identities of men, teachers and students, which probably might be the reason why Aquinas, Dewey and Buber think that collectivism in education can only be implemented to some extent. Difference does not mean less, and with this he brings in
the concept of respectful mutuality that cultivates a subject to subject relationship, between the teacher and the student.

**The use of dialogue as a meaningful concept to direct the relation opens to a real and humane teacher-student relation and not limited by standardization.** On the one hand, it pleas for education systems to view students mutually worthy and does not gauge students by what they can or what they cannot do, not by what they know or what they do not know and of course, not by what they have and what they do not have, rather by means of how the students are able to relate with respect, mutuality and nonviolence despite difference. On the other hand, such an appealing schema also poses a challenge to the role of teachers and the institutional role of teaching. For one, the teacher does not present himself or herself as the master. He or she is a facilitator of relations, a self that opens to the unknowable outside of him or her and that learns from his or her students. The openness within the conversation between teacher and student, and the acceptance of the reality of the teacher learning with the student, would mean challenging universal and cultural notions about what a teacher is. While the teacher may virtuously employ humility on his or her part to participate in this
relation, cultural acceptability of this relation may pose a challenge (and even a threat) for reformation in state education systems.

However, such challenge for educators maybe resolved by implementing the concept of the community of inquiry.

As power in the classrooms is decentered - not in the hands of the teacher or a few, we need the community where every student or child will be part of. Most children, in their young ages are full of questions and ideas, they wonder about everything. Infusing their own reflective and educative experiences within the curricula, the children learn to master procedures in education with connatural learning, experience and dialogue through the community of inquiry.

Utilizing conceptions of inquiry as a spine and backbone of education in a democratic society where each student, child, inquirer or participant is taken as persons and equal members of the inquiring community is the most effective way of challenging standardization. As the community of inquiry functions as an avenue in which individual inquirers bring in their own reflective and educative experiences, participation may happen inevitably. While the seating arrangement - sitting in a circle with the educator and students are at the same level -
symbolizes equality, the added feature of utilizing reflective and educative experiences in the community of inquiry, makes each student feel that they are part of a group, a community that can be bigger than who they are yet not powerful to dominate or distort their very own identities or persons.

More so, as the community of inquiry promotes an inquiring outlook where students think for themselves, Aquinas’ view of imperfection in teaching and Dewey’s critique against traditional education are held accurate. Students in the community of inquiry are not passive individuals accepting whatever is given to them; rather they are engaged in democratic mode of learning. The method involved within the community of inquiry also responds to the challenge of crowded curricula. As students make sense of what they learn in the different areas of knowledge by making of use of their experiences and reflecting through these, the narrow factualism downed in traditional practices is overturned by the critical and creative learning that occurs.

By use of Aquinas’ connatural learning, Dewey’s concept of experience that are reflective and educative and Buber’s notion of dialogue, we move away from studying closed questions in the classroom and from settling with
fixed knowledge that can be examinable but less thoughtful and human, from standardization. Through the process of learning with the other, reconstruction and reorganization of experiences, we give avenues for open questions and the search for knowledge that is based on inquiry, exploration and reasoning. Once this scheme has been put into place, education, learning and experience would provide a ‘fluid structure’ for the use of the community of inquiry as a democratic approach to pedagogy. From this and by this, we save our children from the monsters created by standardization and we reform our society free from the pervasive intellectual slavery and academic colonialization.

After a thorough discussion and reflection, I now attempt to answer the research problems of this study.

To what extent does the framework of the community of inquiry as social reform challenges standardization in schools?

One of the challenges that a teacher and a student face in the era where standardization is still the dominant measure of success is their attitude towards learning. As questioning is the cornerstone of the community of inquiry, to a large extent it challenges all standardization in schools as it opens for opportunities for intellectually
persistent critical and creative thinking, explore alternative possibilities and points of views. While doing so, the members of the community of inquiry also develop desirable social habits that values respect despite difference among members. This can not only lead to cognitive changes in learning but also an improvement in the way students from various backgrounds are seen or treated within the realms of standardization, mind-body dualism that is promoted by traditional education and the use of education as tool for national development and social efficiency. While the community of inquiry extends and hastens students thinking skills, it also opens the practice of equity, equality and social justice in education. Allowing every child or student to think and partake in the inquiry process in whatever way they does not only give them some sense of epistemological empowerment. They are also given opportunities to gain some personal and political capacity to think and speak for themselves.

Furthermore, as learning is an active process in the community of inquiry, the absence of the commonly used form of instruction such as passive teaching, cultivates and encourage higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation), among students and inquirers. Also through
this, the teacher is motivated by this challenging pedagogy and creates spaces for more democratic models of learning in the classroom. Innovation and enterprise as global landmarks that also challenge standardized testing will permeate in the community of inquiry.

To what extent do the standards of democracy through connatural learning, centrality of experience and dialogue, imbibed and embedded within the community of inquiry challenge standardization in schools?

The acquisition of critical thinking skills and collaborative element found in the community of inquiry as I have characterized using Aquinas’ notion of connatural learning, Dewey’s centrality of experience, and Buber’s concept of dialogue certainly promotes democracy in education.

The Periclean conception of democracy as power being in the hands not of a minority but the whole people (Held, 1987, p. 16) is certainly seen and practiced in the community of inquiry. This obviously spells and casts total inclusion as fundamental to a democratic community (Biesta, 2009), one that is actually a great challenge and alternative to standardization practiced in schools.

Of the many practical applications of Aquinas’, Dewey’s and Buber’s philosophies of education to the
current situation in the field of education, the greatest application is found in the way teaching and pedagogy are circumscribed to fit a learning style that promotes standardization.

With all these three philosophies, teaching and learning are promoted not just merely as a matter of indoctrination or intellectual imposition but a cooperative art that makes democracy flourish in the classrooms. As Dewey puts it, “when conditions are provided to stimulate thinking, the learner enters into a conjoint experience (Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 188) and the democratic learning process continues.

With this, the true social reform has been created by the community of inquiry – education, learning and teaching are idea, truth and life centered. The community of inquiry takes its position as constantly building knowledge and also broadening education that is limited by standardization, into its real connections and relationship to life. This is not just social reform but also the unfolding of democracy that saves our schools and our children from the horror that standardization has created.
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