

Teaching Moral Character and Creative Thinking in Primary and Secondary Schools for National Development

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Abstract. Philosophy as an activity is laden with the inculcation of moral character and creative thinking in the younger one, most especially at the primary and secondary levels of Nigeria Education. If we are to go by the submissions of the various schools of thought, one would realize that their implications on Nigeria Education are geared towards the development of moral character and creative thinking so that the Pupils/students of both the Primary and Secondary may be useful for themselves and the society in which they meet themselves for national development (Bamisaye, 1989). Nevertheless, the teachers who are supposed to be guide to these students seemed not to have lived up to expectation of the society as one can presently observe pupils/students involvement in social vices and uncreative activities like boycotting of lessons, watching and practicing pornography, lies telling, violence, dishonesty, disobedient to the constituted authority and other social vices. All these behaviours according to Fasuyi and Adeleye (2013) could be attributed to lack of moral education and creative thinking on the parts of the pupils/student. Based on this, the paper examines the teaching of moral character and creative thinking in primary and secondary schools for national development. This is looked into from the perspective of Pragmatism.

Keywords: Teaching, Moral Character, Creative Thinking Pragmatism and National Development.

1. Introduction

Colonization of Nigeria by the British did more havocs than good to this country. It is a fact that before the advent of the colonial masters, Nigeria had its system of education though informally but through this means, knowledge of values, culture, norms, creative thinking were pass from one generation to the others. The method of education the colonial masters adopted for educating our children had the three Rs for reading, writing and arithmetic but the most essential 4th R- critical thinking seemed to have been deliberately taken away from the curriculum for teaching the black men especially Nigerians. Students were only taught to read and not to reason.

We are therefore challenged by our British education which, for dubious reasons, educated our children along the lines of reading, writing and arithmetic excluding development of moral character which can be gotten when teaching is morally acceptable to the learners as against memorization and regurgitation of facts and figures introduced by the colonial masters which only reduced children to automations and hindered the national development.

2. Teaching of Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools for National Development

Teaching is subject to various definitions and interpretations. Classical definitions state that teaching is imparting of knowledge, training in

skill, giving instruction these are among others. Van Dalen and Brittle defined teaching as the guidance of pupils through planned activities so that they may acquire the richest possible from their experience. From the definitions, we could see teacher as, a person who gives instruction, guide and assist students to learn.

The earliest teaching processes or methods involved sharing information about gathering food, providing shelters, making weapons and other tools necessary for their survival, acquiring the values, behaviour and religion rites and practices of a given culture for their development. Parents, elders among others in the society were the earliest teachers since they taught children through instruction, guidance and assistance, the skills and roles they would need as adults. What they taught eventually formed the moral codes that governed behaviour. Majasan (1995) buttressed this statements when he viewed teacher as somebody who has a genuine calling to facilitate the educational process as well as implement policies and reforms which are aimed at moral values and creative thinking among the students.

Teaching involves methods that are morally sound and acceptable to the pupils/student. Moral acceptability in this sense entails that learners must be given freedom to learn since nobody can learn for him (2003). The teacher takes note of this and in doing so, recognizes that learning is a voluntary activity on the part of the learner. All what a teacher need to do is to put the learner in a conducive atmosphere so the he(learner) may learn from what he can experience. This naturally rules out an impression of teaching as drumming knowledge into the brain of the pupils students in the way that one put water into an empty vessel. When something new is taught, the learner assimilates it by himself. It also rules out the possibility of seeing teaching as an activity whereby it is the teacher that moulds the child without the child contributing to the activity. Teaching is a participatory activity in which the learner is free to ask question when necessary. Not only this, teacher should also be ready to give rational explanation to all the statement made during this interaction. The morally acceptable aspect of

teaching is not to force some learning task down a learner's throat, neither is it to cajore him, to use drugs on him or hypnotize him. All such methods have no regard for the person of the learner and do not take into consideration the voluntaries and willingness on the part of the learner. This is because teaching is not the imposition of one person ideas on the other, but rather a product of interaction between the teacher and the learner to share knowledge for natural development.

3. Teaching Of Creative Thinking In Primary And Secondary School for National Development

Isreal Scheffler (1973) conceived teaching as the exercise that involve mental power, engaging in receiving and processing incoming ideas especially to develop the power of perception, discrimination, retention, combination, abstraction and representation. Teaching is expression of any statement made by the teacher in the classroom. In teaching, the contents of the curriculum will be those that involve the pupils/students in exploring and discovering knowledge by themselves for national development.

Of recent, Nigeria librated herself from the bondage of imperialism in teaching and developed the spirit of reflection and inquiring. The policy of education (2004) states the objectives of primary education which is also the foundation of secondary level of education as include:

- (i) To lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- (ii) To give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity.
- (iii) Ability to adapt to the child changing environment.
- (iv) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and craft of the locality, these among other objectives.

All the above formed the foundation upon which the secondary school education rest on. Despite the absence of critical thinking in the Nigeria primary and secondary school curriculum, virtually all the manuals for teaching subjects designed by the National Teachers institute (2006-2008) recommend critical thinking, discussion and openness as the best teaching strategies. Lipman (1988) averred that every subject seems easier to learn when its teaching is infused with open critical spirit and logical vigour. It is observed that at every stage philosophy is being taught as an autonomous and independent discipline. students and teachers never lose sight of it as a model of creative, yet discipline intellectual inquiry.

The National Teacher Institute (2006) maintains that changes in educational goals demand that schools should not only equip the learner with basic knowledge contained in the scheme of work but also ensure 'higher cognitive skills such as self-development and continuous learning skills. If the emphasis is on thinking and reasoning skills then it might be necessary to lay the foundation of education on their discipline which proper subject matter is thinking. One may ask, what is this discipline under discussion? Lipman (1988) writes that philosophy prepares one to think in that the disciplines and it concentrates on the logical conditions that apply generically to thinking in the languages of the discipline in addition to motivating one to think, philosophy makes one to think better by strengthening one's inquiry and concept formation skills.

To arrive at the aforementioned improved reasoning inquiry and concept formation skills, philosophy favours the existence of shared inquiry and dialectical pedagogy between teachers and learners in the classrooms. With this approach, philosophy keeps other disciplines alive by re-animating the thinking that go into their various inception and subsequent formations. The present day exploring and expression of knowledge are quite constructive and recommendable.

To develop critical thinking in the pupils /students, Socrates approaches to teaching in line with the constructivism theory will be our guide. Constructivism as an educational theory is the view that learners construct meaning as he or she learns. The view has consequences that are all two – fold.

We have to focus on the learners in thinking about learning and also that there is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience constructed by the learners or community of the learners (Adeniyi, 2005). Thus, Socrates as a constructivist, holds that knowledge is not mechanically acquired but actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment. Teaching should develop the ability to generate ideas.

4. Evaluation of the Teaching of Moral Character and Critical Thinking in Nigeria Schools from The pragmatists' Perspectives

Pragmatists generally believe that experience is the source of all knowledge. In this same way, they define teaching in terms of experience. Education comes as a result of experience, it is a lesson learnt from experience. But it is not every experience that is education. The experience that is educative is the type that breads other possible experiences in future. (experience that aid critical thinking). The experience must be productive and must not be a limiting experience. An experience is limiting if it hinders or does not in any way generate a new idea. For example, mere exposition of a fact to a learner without a clear idea of what use to make of this fact could be regarded as a waste of time since that experience cannot generate a new idea for him. Also, showing a photograph of a street in London to a child or a learner just for admiration is a wasteful one since the learner does not know the use to make of the experience. This could be the reason John Dewey cited by Akinpelu (1981) defined education as the continuous reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experience. Since knowledge comes through the

processing of experience by intelligence using the problem – solving method, the aim of teaching is therefore the development of learner’s ability to deal with future problems. Teaching is the process of developing the habit of problem-solving and there is no limit to the development of this ability. The more varied and the complex the problems that he solves, the greater the growth of his intelligence. Hence teacher must develop this in the learner for national development. Since the problems to be solved arise in the course of daily living, it means that the child is learning as he lives from day to day, and each day’s experience, if it is educative, increases his power of critical thinking. Learning in this is not an activity that should take place in a secluded spot or isolation from the child environment.

Kilpatrick a disciple of Dewey prefaced his own recommendations on teaching with a stringent criticism of many aspects of the formal education of his days. First, the traditional school (which is somehow seems to be in practice in Nigeria education system during the colonial period), treats the immature experience of the youngster as something to be quickly passed over so that he may quickly grow up as an adult. In the traditional school, education becomes a preparation for a future adult life: the child is to be equipped with the skills of an adult, he is given ‘a set of promissory note’ as Dewey graphically described it, which he is to redeem when he reaches maturity, but which unfortunately he may not live long enough to Redeem. He is being educated for the future, being equipped for the life he will live as an adult, while he misses the joy of learning, and the skills of coping with his present problems. Teacher, according to the pragmatists, ought to prepare his student to solve the present problem.

Pragmatists attacked also the content of curriculum that is traditionally the same for every child. It is their believe that the children are all massed together and uniformly taught as though they want the same things and are learning at the same rate. What is more, they are all fed on dead information which, being remote from their life experience, has to be memorized and absorbed. The dead information is parceled out in little bits of knowledge in the name of

disciplines. The relevance of these disciplines and life are not clear to the children. The result is what Akinkuotu(1996) described as little bits of knowledge from which nothing follows. Thus, the experience of the children which is normally an integrated unit is fragmented for him as he changes from one unrelated subject to another unrelated subject and switches his thinking from religion to mathematics at the sound of the bell. Another point is that in that type of school, knowledge is taught to the pupils as the finished product of other people’s experience and students are not allowed to realize that they too can produce knowledge from processing their own experience. The method of the teaching itself is not such as can motivate the pupils. The children learn more from the fear of the teacher who talks down to the students rather than with the students. Since the teacher towers so much above the students and exercises so great an authority, the pupils have no option but to sit quietly, listen passively and absorb the facts passively as a sponge absorbs water. What is most important to the teacher in such a school is the presentation of subject-matter, the psychological conditions of learning, in terms of the child’s interest, ability and stage of development and the sociological factors in terms of the relevance of the subject for the social life of the child and the community are of secondary importance. The child is supposed to see the relevance for his life at some future date, and integrate the fragmented pieces of learning all on his own.

This type of teaching cannot develop moral character of the students. It naturally breeds a type of attitude and disposition that is anti-social. This is because the child is made to learn in isolation and to achieve results only through individual efforts (efforts of the teacher alone) rather than group learning or co-operative efforts, only his individualistic rather than social nature is fostered. Dewey believes that mere absorption of facts and truths is so exclusively individual, an affair that can naturally pass into selfishness.

5. Conclusion

The National Policy of Education in Nigeria sees teaching as that process that helps to develop the

whole man physically, mentally, morally among others to enable him function in the society in which he finds himself. If this conception of teaching is true then teachers as facilitators need to be morally and creatively developed with emphasis on character and attitudinal uprightness in their handling of educational resources and other critical concerns of teaching profession. Teachers should as well develop critical thinking in the pupils since they (pupils) learn very fast from what they can experience going by the definition given to teaching by Van Dalen and Brittle, cited by Ayeni (2003). Teaching is about nurturing and developing minds and talents so that learners may be useful for themselves and as well contribute to the development of their society. Teacher should know that critical thinking is an effective resources resides in all pupils and students that needs to be nurtured and enhanced through the use of deliberate tools, techniques and strategies without imposing his own ideas in the learners. Creative thinking can also be improved by encouraging the pupils and students to embark on the projects and activities that provide opportunities for the pupils/students while they are learning useful principles and thereby enhance national development.

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