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MAKING PHILOSOPHY MORE RELEVANT IN TODAY'S EDUCATION

Akinsanya, Patrick O. Ph.D

Abstract
This paper reflects on the challenges besetting philosophy and its teaching in the contemporary world. The challenges discussed range from the nature of the course, handlers of the course, to its curriculum and text. These challenges have incidentally made philosophy appear dull, boring, abstract and 'no-go-area'. So it has become a course to be endured rather than been enjoyed; a guest to be tolerated rather than been argued and celebrated. The paper tries to reclaim, through Deweyan reconstructionism, the original function and glory of philosophy which enjoys a remarkable record of disparate inventions, innovations and creativities in education. It thus recommends, among other things, that non-certified teachers in philosophy of education should no longer be allowed to teach the course, and curricula on philosophy of education at various levels should be reviewed and redesigned to involve more practical and relevant issues, other than abstract and remote.

Key words: Philosophy, Dewey, Reconstruction and Curriculum
Word count: 146

Introduction
The lament raised by Lucas (1969) four decades ago on the state of crisis which philosophy was enmeshed into remains the pathetic and tragic song today. This lament made Hook (1969) to pose a number of questions in his wonderful article: “Does philosophy have a future?” It equally made Feuer (1969) to announce the obituary of philosophy in his work: “American philosophy is dead” given the way academic philosophers have handled philosophy. The same disaster which scholars, beginning from the period of Bertrand Russell, threw philosophy into, making it a ‘dull, dry and austere study’, devoted to semantic purgation with not much practical benefit to humanity, is evidently everywhere. These days, one encounters philosophy teachers with sadistic looks, amply glorified and satisfied with high-sounding lexicons and ceremonious display of cliches in the classroom. When you open their texts, you encounter several pages devoted to explanations on what they are not going to discuss in the text, and the remaining pages are inks spilled on boredomness and dullness. In the same texts are needless arguments on the definition of philosophy and its preoccupations; arguments that are never resolved and may never be resolved. Some even contend to say that philosophy is essentially an activity in argument, as if philosophers are supposed to merely argue for argument sake.

In philosophy of education, similar problems as above are encountered on regular basis. Specifically, there are three major challenges with philosophy of education and its teaching, especially in Nigerian classroom. First, philosophy of education being an applied branch of philosophy, one naturally expects philosophy scholars to be involved in educational issues following the examples of Dewey, Peters, Kilpatrick, Fitgibbon, Dearden, Hirst, etc., and following the practice in advanced Universities in the world. But on the contrary, today’s philosophy scholars (in Nigeria) choose to hide in their sheds with little or no desire to apply their scholarship. They are basically contended with holding each other’s throats on metaphysical, epistemological, axiological and logical questions as if such have no applicable import.

Relatedly, those infinitesimally few scholars who make bold to come out of their self-imposed enclaves, majorly through books and journal articles, undertake an artificial approach to education. With little or no much immersion into real issues of education, they pontificate on educational matters with an aura of infallibility and impeccability. While some follow the lead of Price (1955) by simply lifting the implications of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology to education, like a cut-and-paste-arrangement, and insisting that philosophy of education cannot do otherwise, there are some others who follow the footsteps of Broudy (1955) in deriving philosophy of education singly from philosophic positions, that is, schools of thought, which may imply much or little for education. There are some others, common in most of our departments, who opine that once you pick a respectable philosopher and you begin to interpret what he said and infer what he did not say about education, and thereafter relate the foregoing to education around you, you are simply working in the territory called philosophy of education, and it may not go beyond that. These three major concerns have been raised in my recent work on Philosophizing About Education (2015). It appears to me as it did appear to Hook (1956) that the above are attempts towards “garulous absurdities”. They are simply artificial. To make philosophy of education real and practical, the philosopher, in the company of his...
tools and training, should go into education and philosophise with no pre-meditated or ready-made (a priori) theories or positions. As he does his work, however, it could then be obvious to onlookers which school of thought the scholar is tilting towards and how connected his works are to the compartments (branches) of philosophy, and again, how much of a notable philosopher's ideas he has taken a leaf from.

The third problem involves some educators who accidentally become philosophers. Such people switch all of a sudden, and because they are not deep-rooted in philosophy, they turn philosophical discourses to exercises in narration and description. The problem of root was what made Broudy (1955) to say in categorical terms that the genuine philosophy of education scholar must be found with about equal frequency in the department of philosophy and department of education, which will confer professional training in both philosophy and education. He concluded that one cannot do little or no philosophy and still calls oneself a philosopher of education - (self-contradiction).

This is where we are! But philosophy (of education) cannot continue this way. Philosophy as rightly pointed out by Feuer (1969), is too important to be left in the hands of above categories of scholars, who have chosen to make philosophy appear artificial and incapable of solving practical problems. This is not the philosophy bequeathed to us by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey and a host of others. Education and the entirety of life had practical benefits from their philosophical engagements. They positively affected life. Philosophy in today's world must take a u-turn from the Russelian tradition. Philosophy must be reconstructed. This was the project embarked upon by Dewey some years back.

Reconstructing Philosophy

In one of my works titled Towards reviving philosophy from hegemonic redundancy complex, published in 2012, I examined the works of the most famous American pragmatic philosopher, John Dewey, who was utterly dissatisfied with the notion and mode of philosophizing from the ancient period down to his period. He classified this form of philosophy, traditional, as it stands antithetical to a new kind of philosophy he was trying to introduce alongside other pragmatists. To justify and substantiate the difference, Dewey got involved in philosophizing about philosophy itself - metaphilosophy. One could paraphrase him posing such questions as: What does it really mean to philosophise?, what makes philosophy a philosophy? How do philosophers philosophise? What should be the ideal concern of philosophy?, et cetera. These questions, bordering on metaphilosophy, became necessary given the influences and orientation from Darwinism and pragmatism as introduced by Pierce and Williams. Dewey observed that philosophy had assumed an utter detachment from the world around. This detachment is traceable to the dualism deeply entrenched in the writings of some scholars. Beginning with Plato, one finds a bifurcation of two separate worlds which have nothing in common. The first world is the spatio-temporal world which is replete with frivolities and decay. The second is a non-spatio-temporal world, technically tagged the 'world of ideas,' which is populated by abstract entities called 'forms.' These forms are comprehended only by reason which bequeaths true knowledge on a thinker through a total withdrawal from the world of physical existence. This kind of dualism was reincarnated in Aristotle's form and matter: Augustine's city of God and city of Man. Descartes' mind and body distinction, Kant's noumena and phenomena, and others. These scholars were involved in theorizing around one form of dualism or the other.

These efforts, however, resulted in several problems that were not solved and remain unsolved. Basic among the problem was how to foster a connection between the dualisms created. These seeming problems, as it were, are not problems in the first instance. The desire to create problems where there are no problems, have been the reason for the perceived redundancy of philosophy by people. Another problem associated with this philosophy of dualism is its tendency to get philosophers detached from the physical world. If the 'world of forms' or the 'city of God' is the eternal, ideal, unchanging and perfect world, while the physical world is the world of shadows, mundane and temporal, then it makes sense to get detached from the later, in order to focus on the former. Thus, philosophy became a form of detached thinking from the physical realm, with utmost focus on the metaphysical realm. In doing this, it arrogates itself above all other disciplines, for the reason that while the latter concerns itself with realities of the physical world, philosophy studies a 'higher' kind of reality which by their very nature, are superior to the supposed reality in the spatio-temporal world.

Dewey opined that philosophy had arrogated to itself the office of demonstrating the existence of a transcendent, absolute or inner reality and of revealing to man the nature and features of this higher reality. It had therefore claimed that it was in possession of a higher organ of knowledge than was employed by positive science and ordinary practical experience, and that it was marked by a superior dignity. He states that;

Philosophical doctrines which disagreed about virtually everything else were at one in the assumption that their distinctive concern as philosophy was to search for the inmutable and ultimate, that which is, without respect to the temporal or spatial (Dewey, 1920)
From these conceptions, philosophy earned the name 'mother of all disciplines'. As the mother, philosophy is thus expected to monitor the preoccupations of all other disciplines. But here comes the irony. How can philosophy pose as the mother when her preoccupations are totally divergent to the preoccupations of other disciplines? Where and how does the monitoring come into place? To put it in a more relevant religious manner - How can the man whose interest is nowhere but heavens, legislate over what is been done on earth? There is certainly no convergence. The former will remain ignorant and irrelevant to the happenings in the latter, and vice-versa. Perhaps, this explains the seeming irrelevance attached to philosophy in some quarters. Talisse (2000) captures this submission when he writes that because philosophers have traditionally taken themselves to be concerned with ultimate truths of the sort that could be found only in a transcendent, changeless realm, they have withdrawn from the world; fixing their attention upon a supposedly superior realm, they have abandoned ordinary life, rendering philosophy irrelevant, and so, convinced that they alone have been pursuing truth, philosophers have come to comprise of an elite intellectual class of thinkers who work on exotic and unusual problems, more correctly, they are puzzles, in isolation from every other intellectual endeavour.

The attitude described above dates to antiquity and remains endemic among philosophers. Dewey characterizes the attitude in the following words,

"The creeds that have prevailed have been founded upon the supposed necessity of escape from the confusion and uncertainties of experience. Life has been thought to be evil and hopeless unless it could be shown to bear within itself the assured promise of a higher reality. Philosophies of escape have also been philosophies of compensation for the ills and sufferings of the experienced world (Dewey, 1930)."

If this is what philosophy is all about, it then becomes hard to resist, in line with Talisse (2000), the conclusion and the chorus that philosophy is a means of escape from the physical world in which we live. But should philosophy be an escape route from the world around? This is the puzzle Dewey finds too tempting to avoid. For him, philosophy cannot remain aloof of the happening of the physical world. He seems to say that if the knowledge of the metaphysical world is possible, then such knowledge should proceed from the knowledge of the things we see around - [from known to unknown, from familiar to unfamiliar]. Philosophy must be made relevant to the world. It must make a u-turn or a paradigm shift from relegation to irrelevance. Philosophy must recover itself by ceasing to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and become a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men. One remembers the famous quote of that ancient Roman philosopher, Epictetus; he said - "in vain are the words of the philosopher that do not heal some human wound" (Epictetus in Akinpelu, 2005). Philosophers, according to Dewey, must henceforth turn their back to problems which are not problems in the first instance, and return their attention to problems facing the society. This u-turn will, thus, make philosophy relevant to us; our environment; our world; and education.

Drawing from Dewey's reconstructionism, therefore, philosophy (of education) must be urgently reworked to resolve the teething problems emanating from the usual practice. Major among the problems of philosophy of education is the lack of interest, understanding and appreciation of the subject by teachers-in-training, and one of the basic causes of this is the handling of the subject by teachers who have little or no training in philosophy. Such teachers end up making the subject appear uninteresting and irrelevant to the student. The consequence is a passive abandonment or avoidance of the course by students.

Given the above situation, the system would naturally churn out poorly trained teachers who do not possess the capacity for a rigorous critique of educational ideas or the ability to make insightful contributions to educational processes and practices. Such are better described as educational dummies, fuddy-duddies or robots. Automatically, when the system produces teachers who are not philosophically oriented, there would be a dearth of educational ideas and theories. Philosophy, as it is, goads one into adumbration of ideas, innovation and creativity. The absence of it is detrimental to the system. The dearth of interest in philosophy of education would eventually affect the quality of input in policy formulation and reformulation in the system of education. I have demonstrated somewhere else the place of philosophy in the formulation of education policies (Akinsanya, 2009). Unfortunately for us, the policies that have emerged in the recent times, have suffered quality philosophical inputs expected of their magnitude. The outcome has been a series of mismatches in goals and strategies for implementation.

Conclusion

This paper takes its departure from the crisis faced by philosophy in the contemporary world. This mood gains credence from the activities of philosophers who seem contented in hiding themselves in their philosophical tabernacles as they are detached from issues of practical concern. Following the lead of Dewey, the paper negotiates a paradigm shift from the status quo. It emphasizes the need to hijack philosophy from redundancy...
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back to the realm of functionality where it actually belongs to. The paper thus concludes with Krash (1969) that philosophy of education must adopt the notion that philosophizing ought to make, and should indeed make, a substantial difference in educational scene.

**Recommendations**

The issues discussed, of course, raise some concerns. A concern for philosophy (of education), a concern for the quality of teachers, a concern for teacher education programme, and indeed a concern for Nigerian education system. However, there are remedies:

1. Unqualified teachers in philosophy of education should no longer be allowed to teach the course in the Colleges, Institutes, Faculties and other levels where the subject is required. Only teachers who have been certified as indicated earlier should be permitted to teach the course. The implication of this is that the system would have to encourage people to pick philosophy/philosophy of education as a desired course of study. This could begin by ensuring that there are departments or units of philosophy of education in all Colleges, Institutes and Faculties of Education.

2. The present curriculum of philosophy of education should be reviewed and redesigned to involve more practical and relevant issues, other than abstract and remote.

3. Philosophy scholars in tertiary institutions should be motivated from been satisfied with dwelling in ‘philosophical cubicles’ into engaging their training in practical issues of life. This will naturally ease the little or no-trained in the field out of the system.

4. Educators who are interested in philosophy of education as their area of specialization should be made to undertake courses in both departments of philosophy and education. This will make them well-equipped in the course.

**References**


