Making Education Work in Africa

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Making Education Work in Africa

We have attempted a concept characterisation of our key concepts (Teachers, Teaching and Education) to draw special attention to the type of teachers and the level of teaching that today's rapidly evolving world requires to promote the type and level of Education that is 21st-century compliant. There are, in every society, looming threats to promoting Education using the right type of professional teachers for effective teaching that should ensure most children learning. We have drawn specific examples from our own limited experience in Nigeria and Africa. We have also made the point that the threats call for appropriate responses from different angles, using the Educationeering processes model. It is hoped that the analysis and suggestions are sufficiently weighty to engender more in-depth discussion on a subject that lies at the very heart of Education for Teaching.

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Mentoring and Teaching Profession in Nigeria

Oni, A. Adesoji and Akinsanya, Patrick O.

Introduction

Defining mentoring is not as difficult and tasking as some scholars like Newcombe (1988), Famogbiyele (2013), Melderez and Bodoczky (1999) would want us to believe. Reflecting on the definitions proffered by these and other scholars, certain strands seem common. For instance, Melderez (1999) defines mentoring as the support given by one person for the growth and learning of another, as well as for their integration and acceptance by a specific community. Bullough & Draper (2004) conceive mentoring as close, intense, mutually beneficial relationship between someone who is older, wiser, more experienced and more powerful with someone younger or less experienced. For Coleman & West-Burnham (1996), it is a complex interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporate interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and/or educational development. From these definitions and a host of others, certain things are obvious. First, it is clear that mentoring involves a conscious relationship between two individuals where one is experienced and solidly qualified, while the other is willingly ready to tap from the guidance and repertoire of experience of the former individual. Second, it is a process of professional development which helps in preventing a repetition of earlier made mistakes and wastages of time on already known. The 'new man' simply climbs on the shoulder of the 'old man' without reliving the errors of the past, while the past achievements invariably become his starting point.

Mentoring is not a new concept in teaching, at least not in other nations beyond Nigeria. Teachers in developed nations have always tapped from the benefits of mentoring. Literature is replete with theories and thesis on the impact of mentoring on teaching profession. Pestalozzi (1801), for instance, in his book - How Gertrude teaches her children, believes that teacher has to be taught how to develop the child. The act of good teaching, however, cannot be learnt from books, but practice. Pestalozzi, hence, encourages teachers to attend their colleagues' lessons/classes (especially the more experienced ones) as a means of remedying any deficiency in knowledge and methods.

In other professions like law, medicine, engineering, surveying, etc., mentoring is well entrenched. For instance, all lawyers, and even law students, are familiar with the practice of mentoring, in which a law student or young attorney is paired with a more senior attorney...
culture of teaching. A mentor must -

- Be willing to be a role model for other teachers
- Exhibit strong commitment to the teaching profession
- Believe mentoring improves instructional practice
- Willing to advocate on behalf of colleagues

Benefits Accrueable from Mentoring in Teaching

The merits of mentoring are so numerous and consequential. First, mentoring is highly helpful in gaining professional competence and practice. This merit cuts across the mentor, the mentee and even the system. For the former, Nwecombe (2011) and Famogbiyele (2013) believe that a mentor should be willing to receive training to improve mentoring skills, demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning, be reflective and able to learn from mistakes, be eager to share information and ideas with colleagues, be resilient, flexible, persistent and open-minded, exhibit good humour and resourcefulness, enjoy new challenges and solving problems, be regarded by colleagues as an outstanding teacher, has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter, feels comfortable being observed by other teachers, maintains a network of professional contact, collaborates well with other teachers and administrators, willing to learn new teaching strategies from mentee, offers critiques in positive and productive ways, conveys enthusiasm and passion for teaching, able to maintain a trusting professional relationship, expresses care for mentee's emotional and professional needs.

Roles of Mentors

The roles of mentors according to Malderez & Bodoczky (1999) are basically five.

- Professional instruction and guidance.
- Student mentoring.
- Professional development.
- Coaching and mentoring.
- Personal relationship.

Famogbiyele (2013) identifies the following high qualities that mentors must possess:

- Be able to maintain and professional contact.
- Conveys enthusiasm and passion for teaching.
- Offers critiques in positive and productive ways.
- Conveys enthusiasm and passion for teaching.
- Able to maintain a trusting professional relationship.
- Expresses care for mentee's emotional and professional needs.
- Willing to receive training to improve mentoring skills.
- Demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning.
- Be reflective and able to learn from mistakes.
- Be eager to share information and ideas with colleagues.
- Be resilient, flexible, persistent and open-minded.
- Exhibit good humour and resourcefulness.
- Enjoy new challenges and solving problems.
- Be regarded by colleagues as an outstanding teacher.
- Has excellent knowledge of pedagogy and subject matter.
- Feels comfortable being observed by other teachers.
- Maintains a network of professional contact.
- Collaborates well with other teachers and administrators.
- Willing to learn new teaching strategies from mentee.
- Offers critiques in positive and productive ways.
- Conveys enthusiasm and passion for teaching.
- Able to maintain a trusting professional relationship.
- Expresses care for mentee's emotional and professional needs.

Second, Fafunwa (1995) retorts that a 'people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective anemia, groping blindly into the future without guide posts and precedents to shape their course'. This quotation is analogous, for the people in our context is represented by mentee, while the past is personified in a mentor, wherein the latter acts as a guide and helps the former as he meanders his way through a path that is not too familiar. Rather than go through trials and errors, they repeatedly repeating the mistakes of the past, mentoring helps the new man in teaching to ride on the shoulders of experience of the mentor, thus, saving precious time and guiding against dissipating energies on 'errors'.

Relatedly, mentoring forestalls the 'swim and sink' predicament in teaching. For instance, the experience of senior teachers may be highly needed in teachers' relationship with his students (especially the opposite sex) both in and outside the classroom. If such old experiences are not readily available, the inexperienced teacher may easily find himself swimming in the ocean only to sink given a short time. But with mentoring, such pits are easily avoided like plagues.

Similarly, again, mentoring enables us to preserve and utilize long and hard-earned skills cum talents. If the experiences of senior teachers are not used to nurture junior ones, such experiences are as good as wasted. This is why Famogbiyele (2013) believes that when we do not mentor, we waste talents.

Furthermore, mentoring expands teaching techniques and improves teaching skills. The coming together of the 'old hand' and the 'new hand' offers the opportunity of considering established teaching skills and techniques alongside new discoveries/innovations in pedagogy. Mentoring also builds the right disposition in teachers. A new comer, due to in-experience, may toy with preparation for classes, conduct and
assessment of tests, teaching-learning interaction, relationship with students in and out of the classroom, inter alia. But through the process of mentoring, he/she learns to take the above mentioned activities and others, with the seriousness they actually deserve. He/she learns how to conduct formative and summative evaluations; how best to relate with students especially the opposite sex; he/she even learns how to mentor the students for his/her position ipso facto requires such.

Lastly, mentoring enhances class control/management skills. Controlling a class, especially large classes, requires some dexterity and experience. Every class often features the cooperative and uncooperative, the gentle and the recalcitrant, the studious and truant, the mentally- alert and mentally-adept, the brilliant and the dunce. People do react slowly and harshly to changes, but changes are inevitable. Teaching methods, patterns and orientations may change due to climate, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. If the experienced teacher is not open to these changes, such rigidity might pose grave consequences for the process of mentoring, for the mentee and for the system at large.

Third, the malady of godfatherism could creep in and become entrenched in teaching. Mentors in this case could assume the post of a godfather who is expected to look out for/protect the godson who could sometimes become a pawn-in-hand. Although godfathers could have some advantages in teaching, but its demerits outweigh any possible merit. It could foster laziness in the mentee who may relax because he/she has a strong man to fend for him/her. The mentee could lose his/her identity and simply become mere extension of his/her master - a stooge.

Moreover, mentors could turn out to be tormentors. Given human nature which is bellicose and wicks according to Hobbes (1651) and Machiavelli (1940), some mentors who have not gone beyond human nature could begin to torment those mentees who have the propensities to achieve greater heights than their masters. Easily moved to envy, such mentors could plot against the professional development of those they are supposed to mentor and assist. This will turn out to be a case of bringing a life goat before a roaring and hungry lion.

Again, mentors, especially in Nigerian context, could turn the process of mentoring into 'use him' and 'dump him'. In most cases, such mentors could exploit mentee's capacities by asking them to carry out their own official duties without compensating the mentee, and even predate on mentee's academic efforts in publications; instead of sensitizing the mentees to greater heights, helping them to seek for fellowships and grants, or assisting them beyond academics e.g. in managing emotional crises, financial challenges, etc.

Tackling the Challenges of Mentoring in Nigeria

As lofty and beneficial as mentoring is, there are some challenges that could work against it:

The first and major challenge is the influx of non-professionals in the system. Akinsanya (2006) notes that a good number of people who parade themselves as teachers in Nigerian classroom have no pedagogical or andragogical training. High level of unemployment rate in the country has simply turned teaching into a dumping ground for every tom, dick and harry. This is the situation in the pre-primary, primary, secondary and most especially the tertiary, save the faculties of education in the Universities. The resultant effect of this scenario is not far-fetched. The system will simply be inundated with professionals who will grow with time in self-taught pattern and self-styled methods sometimes faulty, and subsequently will simply not be able to handle the challenges of the profession.

Second, there is a great tendency that mentoring in teaching may perpetrate conservatism or traditionalism. People do react slowly and hardly to changes, but changes are inevitable. Teaching methods, patterns and orientations may change due to climate, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. If the experienced teacher is not open to these changes, such rigidity might pose grave consequences for the process of mentoring, for the mentee and for the system at large.

Probable Challenges which Could face Mentoring in Nigeria

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Tackling the Challenges of Mentoring in Nigeria

There is a way out of these challenges. Foremost, all teachers (both old and new) must be made to realize that mentoring is very key in transforming the teaching profession. Without this realization, nothing can be achieved. Even policy makers and other major stakeholders in education, according to Famogbeye (2013) need to appreciate the need for mentoring not only as a means of providing support and assistance to teachers, but also as a push towards professional development. With this realization, cooperation and commitment of everyone involved will be guaranteed.

Second, it is high time the Federal Government enforced to the letter the provision contained in the National Policy on Education (2013) that "all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained" and that "minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession shall be Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE)"). This becomes necessary so as to flush out those who are not professionally trained in the system, for if non-professionals are left and such become mentors, one could imagine what teaching methodology they will confer on those who will unfortunately come under them for mentoring - nemo dot quod non habet - no one can give out what he/she does not have.

Similar to the above is that we need to start considering seriously the recommendations made in the same national policy that newly qualified teachers should serve a period of internship of one year for degree holders and two years for NCE holders. While the two years for NCE holders may still be reviewed, the one-year recommendation is noteworthy. Going through internship (IT) is nothing but going through mentoring. This is what other professionals in other fields do as mentioned earlier in this paper, IT in teaching will ensure that the new fish in the ocean is integrated and inculcated properly into the profession.

Third, so much sacrifice has to be made by mentors. They should be forebearing, flexible and open to embrace changes. They should create a climate which will support the professional development of teachers in terms of innovation, creativity and ingenuity. This is why Elmajdoub (2004) cited in Famogbeye (2013) feels strongly that mentoring can only thrive in a situation where stressor, restrictor, alienator, disempowerer and controller are absent.

Concluding Remarks

The first and major challenge is the influx of non-professionals in the system. Akinsanya (2006) notes that a good number of people who parade themselves as teachers in Nigerian classroom have no pedagogical or andragogical training. High level of unemployment rate in the country has simply turned teaching into a dumping ground for every tom, dick and harry. This is the situation in the pre-primary, primary, secondary and most especially the tertiary, save the faculties of education in the Universities. This becomes necessary so as to flush out those who are not professionally trained in the system, for if non-professionals are left and such become mentors, one could imagine what teaching methodology they will confer on those who will unfortunately come under them for mentoring - nemo dot quod non habet - no one can give out what he/she does not have.

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References


Making Education Work in Africa

Introduction
It will be ideal to introduce the subject of this paper from a theoretical standpoint so as to be able to place the discussion in proper perspective. Theoretically, it is necessary to reflect on the need for functional, convertible, applicable, practical and relevant national education system as propagated by some past educational philosophers. A summary of some of these great educational philosophers and their education doctrines is given as support of the theme of this paper. The following philosophers, Quintilian, Elyot, Loyola, Comenius, Milton and Locke whose educational doctrines bear direct relevance to this discussion have been discussed.

According to Quintilian (c AD 35 - 100) "...theoretical knowledge alone is of little use without experience" (Rusk, 1957: 38). Experience, according to him, is the essence of practical life skills that an educated learner should acquire and be able to utilize at the end of training for advancement of the self and further use them to help bring about meaningful changes in society.

Elyot (c. AD 1490-1546), an English educational philosopher, was much concerned with the upbringing of "gentlemen's sons". He emphasized practical training for public office bearers in order for life to become practically oriented (Rusk 1957: 53).

Loyola (c. AD 1491-1556), a Spanish educational philosopher and theologian, was influential in the Catholic Reformation of the 16th century and the founder of the Society of Jesus. His system of educational practice has taught the world the value of uniformity and universal methodology in education. He emphasized the economy of resources pertaining to training in life skills. He was adamant that all training in life skills should take cognisance of the local conditions in terms of resources [material and labour] and the needs of the community (Rusk 1957: 63).

Comenius (c. AD 1592-1670), a Czech educational reformer, was known for his innovative methods of teaching (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1988: 482). According to him, "...principles should be applied in practice" (Rusk 1957: 87). He indicated and emphasized the need for reorganization of educational institutions and a revolution in educational methods and practice and indicated that education should prepare the educand for both the present and the future. In his curriculum proposal, he suggested that all subjects that were to be studied should be arranged to suit the age of...
About The Book
This 42 chapter book- *Making Education Work in Africa* examines some of the existing problems in African education. The book suggests possible solutions that should be inculcated to bringing education sector of Africa to life. When these are accepted and carried out, the education department of Africa will be revived. The book is a culmination of theories and praxes for the benefit of teachers in the classrooms, teacher trainers, policy makers, funding agencies, students, other stakeholders, African development.

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