EDUCATIONAL THEORY: THE ROLE OF THE PHILOSOPHER OF EDUCATION

SHINGA, ALPHONSUS JOSEPH
Department of Educational Foundations
FCE (T) Gombe, Gombe State
SHIKTONG, MAXWELL JOSHUA
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Jos, Plateau State
&
ABIDA, RABIU MAGEM
Department of Educational Foundations
F.C.E. (T.) Gombe

Abstract

This paper discusses educational theories and the philosophy of education. The work provides the imperativeness of philosophical pundits on the issue of educational theories and tries to give clarity on the main activities of philosophers of education in handling problems in the field of education. It is established that philosophers often engage themselves in trying to get at the truth on certain important questions by rational means. The paper provides conceptual clarification on certain concepts that formed the topic which include education, theories, philosophy, educational theories and philosophy of education. The paper revealed that the tasks of philosophy of education include among other things, the analysis and clarification of concepts (e.g. knowledge, freedom, authority, discipline, equality, etc) the critical examination of presupposition (e.g. ethical, epistemological, metaphysical, etc) and "attempting to relate or think together as systematically as possible the carefully analyzed contributions from different fields of knowledge and experience". The paper also revealed that philosophers of education are concerned with a scrutiny of what is said about education by those who practise it and by those who theorize about it. It is discovered in this work that it is the complicated phenomena of education as a group of activities going on at various logical levels, 'logical' in the sense that each higher level arises out of and is dependent on the one below that gives rise to theorizing about education. The conclusion of this work is that unless educational activities were carried on and talked about, there would be no subject matter on higher order activities to work on. The result of educational theorizing is educational theory, or more accurately educational theories.

Introduction

It is a common assumption that education remains the most significant pursuit of the human race in the world. The economic, social and technological imperatives that accompany education make it an area of major interest by all and sundry. Education has been part of man's main activities in the world: it has been employed to serve as a vehicle for social transformation, mutual understanding or co-existence and a veritable tool for cohesion and development. Education is involved with both the world of ideas and the world of practical activity; good ideas can lead to good practices and good practices can emanate from good ideas. Hence, in order to behave intelligently in the educational process, the educator needs the things philosophy can provide; that is, understanding of thinking processes and ideas, and how these interact with practical affairs.

This paper provides the essential and impeccable roles of the philosopher of education in the business of education, pointing to the philosophy of education not as a mere professional tool for clarifying and justifying educational concepts and theories, but as a way of improving the quality of life. This is so because it helps us gain a wider and deeper perspective of human existence. The paper also provides conceptual clarification on the concepts that made up the topic. It also explains the worth of a philosopher of education and how he carries out his roles which validate or substantiate any theory of education. The paper concludes that the inevitability of philosophy of education is deeply rooted in core activity of philosophers: finding the truth by means of critical and reflective thinking, and even events that run their own capricious courses.

Conceptual Clarification
Education:

The term education has been variously used to mean different things to different people and perhaps for different purposes. The different usages of the term make it difficult to have a precise definition. It is even more difficult to ascertain among philosophers given the fact that philosophers have hardly agreed on any single matter. However, it is from such disagreements that the search for new social, political, economic, religious and educational systems have developed. From the etymological point of view, "to educate is to lead out or bring out", interpreted from the Latin word for education which is "educare", meaning "to draw out or lead out"[1]. From this point of view, education could mean to extract the latent potentials of the recipient. Peters and Hirst in Enoh hold the view that education is initiation into worthwhile activities; the initiation into forms of knowledge and public traditions enshrined in a public language'[2]. Going by this view, education consists of initiating people into activities, mode of conduct and thought which have standards written into them to a possible coherence to think, act and feel with different degree of skills, relevance and appreciation.

Peters describes education as a "family of morally legitimate procedures which aim to develop intrinsically worthwhile state of mind with wide ranging cognitive content"[3]. What Peters subscribes here is that, education has to be legitimized bearing in mind the state of individual's moral considerations and intellectual benefits. Peters in Omatseye considers education also as a "process of socialization, enculturation and transmission of what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it, be they children or adults"[4] According to this view, education must be a worthwhile activity with specified purpose and intention which cut across the barriers of age, culture and social stratification.

From the proceeding views, one can see education as deliberate, intentional and careful planned activities to carter for the holistic need of the recipient and for the benefit of the society. Education should arm the individual with knowledge, skills and sound morals to be able to function effectively in the society as a productive citizen. Undoubtedly, education underlies the overall development of mankind despite the different views which individuals, organizations, or societies may hold of it. This is what cut across any form of the definition of what education ought to be.

Theory

Theory is a difficult subject matter that will not have a codified or satisfied explanation or definition as there are different views from different perspectives in this regard. Koshal sees theory as a "collection of ideas, facts, phenomena or events that can be used to explain a certain topic"[5]. A theory provides an explanation for observations and based upon the various assumptions of this explanation, several possible hypotheses can be derived in order to test the theory. When developing a theory, it is necessary to use the rational and contemplative forms of generalized and abstract thinking while a theory is based upon general factors that are independent of the phenomenon being explained. Koshal further states that "theories although not considered as facts, can be named as the best possible educated guess surrounding a certain phenomenon".[6]

From the etymological point of view, according to the Business Dictionary, "theory originated from Greek word "thoros", meaning "spectator".[7] Theories can also be considered as a set of assumptions, propositions, or accepted facts that attempt to provide a plausible and rational explanation of cause-and-effect (causal) relationship among a group of observed phenomena. Theory attempts to give explanation to perceived reality and also explains how some aspect of human behaviour or performance is organized. The main component or distinctive feature of a theory is that it must be able to be tested and approved or disapproved and accepted or rejected.

Philosophy

Perhaps philosophy is one of the most misunderstood and generally regarded as the most abstruse and abstract of all subjects or areas of knowledge. It is even more compounding as those (philosophers) in the business of philosophy do not even agree on any subject matter to be considered as indisputable established fact without scrutiny or rational examination. So, even the definition of philosophy has no universally accepted definition. Etymologically, philosophy means "the love or pursuit of wisdom" from the two Greek words "philo" (love) and "Sophia" (wisdom).

Hirst sees philosophy as an:

> area that is concerned with clarification of concepts and prepositions through which the human experience and activities become more intelligible; it is also a second-order of knowledge concerned above-all, with the necessary features of man's understanding and awareness in the sciences, in morals, in history.[8]

Philosophy can be considered from its strict sense or from its popular sense. Hirst maintains that philosophy can be considered from its strict sense or professional sense:

> When philosophy is treated as an academic discipline which engages scholars, they use logical consistent and systematic thinking in their efforts to reach consistent, coherent and sound conclusions about man, the world, and everything that exist natural or supernatural.[9]

Following from the above, one sees philosophy as distinct from other disciplines or fields of knowledge. In philosophy, pure reason is used to clarify ideas by asking questions. It is unlike the physical sciences which use empirical data to establish the truth of their findings. Philosophy also focuses attention on words and meaning, it examines concepts and notions to determine the various meaning they have in different contexts. In other words, it can inquire into the accuracy of meaning and logic of language.

Educational Theory

When educational theory is viewed from an angle of a single body of knowledge, the likelihood of misunderstanding cannot be avoided. Hence, educational theory is not a single theory, rather an umbrella term that covers many theories and assumptions of learning and retaining information. In simplistic term, educational theory could be referred to as:

> Theories that explain the application, interpretation and purpose of learning and education. Educational theory is

affected by several factors, including theoretical perspective and epistemological position. As it is with philosophers, there is no one, clear, universal explanation of how we learn and subsequent guidebook as to how we should teach. Rather, there are a range of theories, each with their background in a different psychological and epistemological tradition.[10]

To understand learning then, we have to understand the theories and the rationale behind them.

Theories are used for numerous reasons, one of it is to help explain a puzzling or complex issue and to predict its occurrence in the future. Learning remains a latent variable so there is no clear and universal way to explain and predict learning. To help explain this process, therefore, theories based on differing epistemological positions have been developed to explain the procedure. The complex and comprehensive conceptual explanations provided within the framework of a theory can be applied in different settings. Theories provide different "lenses" through which to look at complicated problems and social issues, focusing their attention on different aspects of the data and providing a framework within which they conduct their analysis.

Following from the above, it becomes glaring as Ozmond and Craver also state that philosophers of education are concerned with a "scrutiny of what is said about education by those who practise it and by those who theorize about it"[11] In this light, one may regard the complicated phenomena of education as a group of activities going on at various logical levels. "logical" in the sense that each higher level arises out of and is dependent on the one below it. The lowest level is the level of educational practice at which activities like teaching, instructing, motivating pupils, advising them, and correcting their work are carried on. These activities and other concepts are basic and arising out of these ground-floor activities is another activity, educational theorizing, the first 6 of these higher-order concerns. The result of educational theorizing is educational theory, or more accurately, educational theories.

Philosophy of Education

Philosophers have been acute observers of the human conditions and have articulated their observations in ways that are in structure to modern man. Educators cannot only be aided by the careful and systematic approach to ideas that philosophers have fostered, but can gain inspiration from philosophers towards developing new insights into contemporary problems. Although the practice of education has developed along with theories about education, it has become easy at times for people to overlook this connection between theory and practice and to

deal with the practice apart from theory. We may be in a dilemma today because we seem to be more involved with an analysis of theory of education and its connection with practice. The gap between theories and practices is often filled by philosophy of education.

Philosophy of education is connected with general philosophy partly by its purposes but more directly by its methods. In one basic sense, we can say that philosophy of education is the application of general philosophy to educational problems. We can also say with equal force that the practices of education lead to refinement of philosophical ideas. Hirst on his part believes that philosophy (of education) is concerned with clarification of concepts and preposition through which human experiences and activities become more intelligent"[12]. It is also a second – order area of knowledge, concerned above all, with the necessary features of man's understanding and awareness in the sciences, in morals in history and so on.

Ozmond and Craver observe that philosophy of education represents a value system which encompasses man's experiences in a world in which he lives and out of which he seeks meanings"[13]. It is the totality of his beliefs which may have undergone reasoned and logical processes and thus emerged as a worldview guiding his actions within a systematic and deliberate setting. Greetham asserts that of all "the conceptions held of philosophy of education, none is as widely known as Dewey's dictum which asserts that Philosophy in its general sense may be defined as the general theory of education"[14] Portelli opines that this affirmation of the "ultimate relationship between philosophy and education has over the year's authenticated the legitimacy of educational philosophy as a discipline"[15]

The Worth of a Philosopher

Philosophy represents a value of system which encompasses man's experiences in a world in which he lives and out of which he seeks meaning. It is the totality of his beliefs which may have undergone reasoned and logical processes and thus emerges as a worldview guiding his actions. Philosopher, as a human being is not only aware of sensations, he reflects on them, he engages in complex reasoning and lateral thinking. He evaluates data, develops ideas, exercises imagination and makes decisions. The ultimate goal of a philosopher is to establish the truth of every matter or phenomena which cannot be subjected under any further scrutiny or at least the validity of every claimed knowledge or theory that must stand on the basement of truth. The question that may follow the above assertions is, how do we know the truth?

There are two broad theories that are applicable in establishing what is truth: the coherence theory and the correspondent theory.

The Coherence Theory

For any assertion to be considered true, there must be consistency in the connections of our ideas. Blanchard states that "Once we have sorted this out and we are clear about the connections between our ideas, we can consider in the second test whether there is enough evidence to support them".[16] What this means is that, our ideas must cohere with what is in reality in order to establish a true assertion. In this aspect, philosophers would always test both the internal and external validity of any theory. In the internal test, our concern is to check that theory itself is adequate to answer the problem. In the external test, we turn out attention beyond the theory to its relations our other ideas and beliefs. We have to be sure that it fits within a coherent system of ideas.

The Correspondent Theory

Greetham states that in the correspondent theory, philosophers are always seeking the truth of any theory or claimed knowledge by trying to connect known beliefs with new assertions by asking whether what is being argued are "sufficient or necessary conditions or both, for the truth of our theory".[17] It is important to determine which sense applies to the logical connection between two or more ideas, because, it will shape the way we can evaluate the claims made of any knowledge or belief.

Sufficient Conditions: A condition is sufficient if its truth is all that is required for a belief to be true, or a certain event to occur. When an assumption is a sufficient condition for a belief to be true, it is said to entail that belief. In other words, given the assumption, the belief necessarily follows, so that if the assumption is true, then so too the belief. For instance:
A.   Segun is my father's brother.
B.   Therefore, Segun is my uncle
As we can see the truth of A is sufficient for the truth of B, that is, if A is true, then B must be true as well.

Necessary Conditions: An assumption is a necessary condition if it must be true in order for another belief to be true or an event to occur. When a proposition X necessarily cannot be true unless another proposition Y is true, then the truth of Y is by definition a logical necessary true condition for X. when a proposition like this must be true for the theory to be true, it is said to be a preposition of the theory. Nduka maintains that necessary assumptions are entailed by the theory they presuppose, therefore, if you can show them to be false, you have disproved the theory"[18]

Following from the preceding discussion, one can glaringly see that philosophers are engaged in a task that not everyone can do especially on matters

that are complicated and sometimes seem contradictory. The philosopher is never satisfied with dogmas that cannot be scrutinized. Through scrutiny and analysis, new areas of knowledge have refuted aged-long dogmas. All theories, be they scientific, technological or educational must pass through the corridor for the test of truth – worthiness in order to establish their acceptance.

Other areas where the test for truth can be ascertained are logical consistency, empirical adequacy and experiential relevance. All ascertains or assumptions must be logically consistent in order not to falsify them. Following this, are there ways that such assumptions can be verified empirically such that no rooms are given for doubt and repudiation. Lastly, for assumptions to be considered true, there must be some forms of experiential relevance to the existence of humanity or else they will be discarded as false and irrelevant.

The tradition of questioning and analysis (made possible by the existence of freedom of thought) together with the multiplicity of speculative answers signaling challenges to accepted myths, dogmas and the traditional system of thought was the essence of the Greek enlightenment. This ferment of ideas gave birth to the most glorious achievement of Greeks in art, literature, science, mathematics, and above all, philosophy. Hence, philosophers of education are consistently and constantly refining theories that are supposed to be educational, making clarifications and justifications on concepts and ideas aiming at enhancing the enterprise of education.[17] The tasks of philosophy of education include, among other things, the analysis and clarification of concepts (e.g. knowledge, freedom, authority, discipline, equality, etc, the critical examination of pre-suppositions (e.g. ethical, epistemological, metaphysical, etc) and "attempting to relate or think together as systematically as possible the carefully analyzed contributions from different fields of knowledge and experience. Philosophical enterprise does not consist in the number and certainty of answers it provides but, rather, in the questioning, probing attitude of mind it engenders.

Conclusion

The enterprise of education will remain a practice in the shadow if theories and practice are not met where the philosopher or education stands in the middle. No intelligent philosophy of education is involved when educators do things simply because they were done in the past or were expedient to do so. In the same manner, theories about education will be a "waste land" if the pundits of philosophical minds are explicated. The rigours of philosophizing are to bring to bare all grey areas of contradictions and confusion. The role of the philosopher of education in providing clarity and justification can lead to refined educational theories, while sound theories can lead to proper practice of education. Without careful, systematic and

rigorous work of the philosophers of education, those practising education will continue to drift aimlessly in a sea of rhetoric and patchwork panaceas.

References

1. Ayeni, A.I. "Education and freedom" in Kola Babarinde, ed., Education and the challenge of patriotism in Nigeria (Ijebu – Ode: Philosophy of education Association of Nigeria, PEAN 2000), 36
2. Enoh, A.O. "Education and Equality in the Quest for Nationhood, in Kola, Babarinde, ed., Education and challenges of patriotism in Nigeria (Ijebu – Ode: PEAN, 2000),84.
3. Peters, R.S. Ethics and Education (London: G. Allen & Uniwin, 1966), 45
4. Omatseye, J. N. *Educational philosophy and the African school* (Benin: Jodah Publications, 1992) 5
5. Koshal, M. difference between concept and theory. www.difference between.com. Retrieved: 10 Oct., 2017.
6. Ibid.
7. Business Dictionary. Www. Businessdictionary.com Retrieved: 9 October, 2017.
8. Hirst, P. *Knowledge and the curriculum* (London: Rougledge of Kegan Paul, 1974) 2
9. Ibid.
10. Waluchow, W. *The Dimentions of Ethics: An Introduction to Ethical Theory*. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003) 34
11. Ozmond, H. & Craver, S. *Philosophical Foundations of Education*. (Charles Merill Publishing Company, 1976)
12. Hirst, P. *Knowledge and Curriculum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 1-2
13. Ozmond, P. & Craver, S *Op. cit.*
14. Greettham, B. *Philosophy*. (New York: Palm Grave Macmillan, 2006) 12-13
15. Portelli, P. J. "Analytical Philosophy of Education: Development and Misconceptions "Journal *of Educational Thought (JET)* Vol 21 No 1 (Accessed May, 2017)
16. Blanchard, J. *Does God believe in Atheists?* (England. EP. Books, 2014).
17. Greettham, B. *Philosophy. (*New York: Palm Grave Macmillan, 2006) 12-13 18.Nduka, O. *The Roots of African Underdevelopment and Other Essays*. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006).