

Philosophy of Education and Its Importance to Society

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Abstract

This is why, in a society of the future, education will play an essential role in creating the new way of life specific to knowledge and learning based society. The introduction in the educational system of new teaching techniques is a prerequisite to national economic and cultural success, as well as to increased economic competitiveness. The human civilization with its new technologies can only exist while the focus on the elements and variables of human personality. The traits of intellectual and original creativity seem to tend to play a major role. "The immediate change is the intellectualization of the work process that puts the accent on creativity and opens a new free horizon to the decision-making process" (Toffler, 1995). In developing a curriculum (whether in a specific subject area, or more broadly as the whole range of offerings in an educational institution or system), a number of difficult decisions need to be made. Issues such as the proper ordering or sequencing of topics in the chosen subject, the time to be allocated to each topic, the lab work or excursions or projects that are appropriate for particular topics, can all be regarded as technical issues best resolved either by educationists who have a depth of experience with the target age group or by experts in the psychology of learning. But there are deeper issues, ones concerning the validity of the justifications that have been given for including particular subjects or topics in the offerings of formal educational institutions.

Keywords: *Society, Civilization, Personality, Education and Learning.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Dr. Janaiah Chimata,

Philosophy of Education and Its Importance to Society,

RJPSSs 2017, Vol. 43,
No.2, pp.220-225,
Article No. 29 (RJ1945)

Online available at :
[http://anubooks.com/
?page_id=2012](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=2012)

Introduction

Education has been part of the human society from the very beginning. Human societies throughout the ages have had vested interests in education. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that without education, most societies would die. Philosophy of Education is a term that can be used to refer to the academic field that involves applied philosophy. It can also be used to describe philosophies that promote certain visions of education, examining the goals, meaning and other aspects.

While most societies will agree or acknowledge the importance of education, a large number of them fail to channel sufficient resources that can be used to promote and support educational institutions and activities. It is clear to everyone that children, who are born innumerate and illiterate, quickly learn the culture and norms of the community they are born into, with the help of those around them and professional teachers. Within a short time, the children are able to read, write and act in an appropriate way. The skills improve as the child grows and with time, they will have learned enough to enable them to operate in the society without constant guidance.

Education today can serve as a mechanism for social sorting. People have different learning skills with some exhibiting more facility than others. Education plays a major role on the economic fate of every individual. Education helps to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills that allow them to be able to define and pursue their individual goals. It also allows people to participate in the community, playing their part to improve their conditions and the condition of the society at large. While many may view education in a very individualistic way, it is important to look from a societal perspective. The more educated individuals in the society, the more developed that society. Unfortunately most societies today are embracing the narrow view that encourages people to get an education as a way to enhance their own individual needs. This has led to a few individuals holding the view that they are autonomous. In the end, this same individual's end up living very unfulfilled lives. Education should be able to create individuals who are assets to the society at large. Formal education provided by the state is an acknowledgment of the importance of Philosophy of education for the survival of the society.

Relation between Philosophy and Education

What problems are philosophical? Is Education Philosophical? Philosophers usually consider their task as that of understanding man and universe. This is a tall order and is difficult to deal with all at once. Consequently, the large problem is broken down into many smaller ones.

The different justifications for particular items of curriculum content that have been put forward by philosophers and others since Plato's pioneering efforts all draw, explicitly or implicitly, upon the positions that the respective theorists hold about at least three sets of issues. First, what are the aims and or functions of education (aims and functions are not necessarily the same)? Alternatively, as Aristotle asked, what constitutes the good life and/or human flourishing, such that education should foster these? These two formulations are related, for it is arguable that our educational institutions should aim to equip individuals to pursue this good life. Although this is not obvious, both because it is not clear that there is one conception of the good or flourishing life that is the good or flourishing life for everyone, and it is not clear that this is a question that should be settled in advance rather than determined by students for themselves. Thus, for example, if our view of human flourishing includes the capacity to act rationally and/or autonomously, then the case can be made that educational institutions and their curricula should aim to prepare, or help to prepare, autonomous individuals. A rival approach, associated with Kant, champions the educational fostering of autonomy not on the basis of its contribution to human flourishing, but rather the obligation to treat students with respect as persons (Scheffler 1973/1989, Siegel 1988). Still others urge the fostering of autonomy on the basis of students' fundamental interests, in ways that draw upon both Aristotelian and Kantian conceptual resources (Brighouse 2006, 2009). How students should be helped to become autonomous or develop a conception of the good life and pursue it is of course not immediately obvious, and much philosophical ink has been spilled on the matter. One influential line of argument was developed by Paul Hirst, who argued that knowledge is essential for developing and then pursuing a conception of the good life, and because logical analysis shows, he argued, that there are seven basic forms of knowledge, the case can be made that the function of the curriculum is to introduce students to each of these forms (Hirst, 1965, Phillips, 1987) Another is that curriculum content should be selected so as "to help the learner attain maximum self-sufficiency as economically as possible" (Scheffler, 1973/1989).

Second, is it justifiable to treat the curriculum of an educational institution as a vehicle for furthering the socio-political interests and goals of a ruler or ruling class and relatedly, is it justifiable to design the curriculum so that it serves as a medium of control or of social engineering? In the closing decades of the twentieth century there were numerous discussions of curriculum theory, particularly from Marxist and postmodern perspectives, that offered the sobering analysis that in many educational systems, including those in Western democracies, the curriculum does indeed reflect and serve the interests of the ruling class. Michael Apple is typical: the

knowledge that now gets into schools is already a choice from a much larger universe of possible social knowledge and principles. It is a form of cultural capital that comes from somewhere, that often reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity. In its very production and dissemination as a public and economic commodity as books, films, materials, and so forth it is repeatedly filtered through ideological and economic commitments. Social and economic values, hence, are already embedded in the design of the institutions we work in, in the 'formal corpus of school knowledge' we preserve in our curricula (Apple, 1990).

Third, should educational programs at the elementary and secondary levels be made up of a number of disparate offerings, so that individuals with different interests and abilities and affinities for learning can pursue curricula that are suitable? Or should every student pursue the same curriculum as far as each is able a curriculum, it should be noted, that in past cases nearly always was based on the needs or interests of those students who were academically inclined or were destined for elite social roles. Mortimer Adler and others in the late twentieth century sometimes used the aphorism "the best education for the best is the best education for all".

Such groupings of philosophical Sciences, and even the gathering of problems under each of the specific sciences, may seem hard to justify, since there is so much overlapping. Yet, if each science and each grouping is taken as a core problem rather than as an area with well defined boundaries, philosophical- communication is provided with great convenience.

Placing the Philosophy of Education

What, then, is the place of the philosophy of education a) in philosophy and b) in the discipline of education? Let us consider its place in philosophy first. During major part of this century the philosophy of education was represented as a part or offshoot of metaphysics and epistemology. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions about reality what things are real and how they are related to one another and epistemology the branch that deals with questions about the nature and extent of our knowledge and about the definition and tests of meaning and truth. Thus it was thought that philosophers of education should be classified according to their theories of, reality and knowledge. It is not being denied that metaphysical and epistemological doctrines are relevant to questions about education. There certainly are points at which philosophers refer to or explain their views about knowledge and reality in discussing education; for example, in the following selections, Whitehead does so when he talks about reverence in the last sentence of the first essay or when he says in the second that "each individual embodies an adventure of existence", and Maritain does so when he introduces "the philosophical religious

idea of man” in opposition to the “scientific” one or criticizes the pragmatic theory of knowledge and truth. Dewey, of course, does so when he assumes that the scientific conception of man and the pragmatic theory of knowledge and truth, defended elsewhere in his works, are correct. In general, however, as the selections in this book show, the relevance of epistemological and metaphysical doctrines to the problems of educational philosophy is less considerable and less direct than it has usually been thought to be, and hence, it seems to me that the most fruitful way of thinking about the philosophy of education is to think of it as a part or offshoot of moral and social philosophy, as Plato, Aristotle, and even Dewey did. That is, it seems to me that questions about the aims, methods, kinds, program and administration of education are primarily questions of moral and social philosophy, and only secondarily related to epistemology and metaphysics. Metaphysical and epistemological doctrines may still be relevant in important ways; this will be only because they have a bearing on the problems of moral and social philosophy.

Regarding the discipline aspect of education, (b) we must first notice that the term “education” may mean any of the following things:

- 1) What parents, teachers, and schools do, or, in other words, the activity of educating the young;
- 2) What goes on in the child or in the process of being educated?
- 3) The result or what the child acquires or has in the end, namely “an education”, or
- 4) The discipline of education, that is, the discipline that studies (1), (2) and (3).

Conclusion

Through participation in common productive activities at school, children develop a social outlook and no more look upon material goods produced by them from an acquisitive or individualistic point of view but learn to share them with the rest of the community. Basic education aims at paving the way for a classless society without hatred and class war. Through self reliance even for their own education, children will not only take off the burden from their parents but will prepare themselves for the citizenship of a rural democracy where power both economic and political is not concentrated in the hands of a few and individual freedom is harmonised with the authority of the State. Thus Basic Education was meant to be a potent instrument for the establishment of a non violent society.

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