Chapter 7

A Teaching Philosophy: A Prerequisite for Effective Pedagogical Practices in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the importance of an educator’s “teaching philosophy” as a major prerequisite for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Teacher Education. The critical need for this examination is guided by the complex nature of challenges that educational institutions are continually faced with such as, diversity, students’ awareness of their rights, ethnicity and negative ethnicity, information technology, capitalism and commodification of the educational enterprise, international competitiveness in both teaching and learning among others. Further, quality driven ESD programmes are currently a global concern. To guide this study were the following research questions: What is Sustainable Development (SD) and ESD? What is a teaching philosophy? What is the purpose of a teaching philosophy? What should inform an educator’s teaching philosophy? In which ways can an educator implement his/her teaching philosophy? And, what characterizes a clear teaching philosophy? Finally, recommendations that can inform theory, policy and practice are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Those who educate children well are more to be honored than even their parents, for these only give them life, those the art of living well (Aristotle- 384-322 BC)

In the wake of many challenges facing teachers and the teaching profession such as (big class sizes, heavy work load, mainstreaming and its related perspectives, integration of technology) (Keengwe, 2013; Kibera & Kimokoti, 2007; 2006; Nieto, 2003), an intriguing question that can be asked is: “what keeps teachers/educators going in spite of everything”? In all societies, education is given a central place by allocating enormous resources and time because it is the foundation for any successful society. As pointed out by UNESCO (2001), quality education is a prerequisite for ESD. A growing body of literature and research indicates that teachers who lack well defined self reflective views about why they are in the teaching
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profession are more likely to leave the profession or be underachievers (Hammond, 2003). A dearth of research acknowledges the complexity involved in teaching effectively at all levels of learning. Further, even when some information is available on what makes educators effective, emphasis has been on the primary and secondary school levels to the exclusion of tertiary institutions (Kreber, 2005; Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002).

It is also important to note that in all the studies reviewed, with the exception of online sources, scholars have “evaded” to use the phrase “a teaching philosophy” and have used terms such as: teaching beliefs, theories, values about teaching, assumptions about teaching, reflection on knowledge about teaching (Kane et. al., 2002; Kreber, 2005; University of Minnesota (UMN), 2009). A brief preview of some key documents (TSC Charter; TSC Code of Ethics for teachers, 2002) that describe the functions of the TSC in Kenya reveals that the idea of a teaching philosophy or even its generic presentation is glaringly absent. The author in this paper acknowledges that the idea is new in Teacher Education literature especially in African countries, and hence the reason the idea is fore-grounded in this paper.

According to the TSC Code of Conduct and Ethics (2002)

A teacher shall always, in carrying out his [her] duties respect, protect, and promote the human rights and freedom of students without discrimination on the basis of race, tribe, political opinions, color, creed, sex, disability, social status or culture. A teacher practicing this career shall also maintain his [her] professional aptitude. He [she] shall not convey, or allow others to convey the impression that anyone is in a position to influence him [her]… In this case, he shall not engage himself [herself] in any sexual activity with a student regardless of a student’s consent or not… A teacher shall always be punctual and meet his [her] deadlines in executing his [her] duties. In his [her] evaluation of students, a teacher shall be honest and judge only on the basis of performance (3).

A critical analysis of some of the unethical practices by teachers reported in our educational institutions such as sexual harassment, cheating of examinations and supplying illicit drugs (Kanga, 2004; Education Insight, 2010) puts into question the seriousness in which teachers take the code of conduct and ethics. Consequently, as this paper foregrounds, the idea of “A teaching philosophy” in the minds and practice of Kenyan teachers/educators, or even within the larger African region, seems neither nurtured nor named and hence the need to theorize it. Such theorizing can be the basis of the practice of a teaching philosophy.

A cursory look at the history of the TSC (TSC, 2011) show that professional ethics for teachers are not clearly defined, as stated, “The TSC should not register unsuitable persons as teachers” (3). The term ‘unsuitable persons’ is not clearly defined. The overarching argument of this paper is that a key guiding principle to determine a good teacher is a clear teaching philosophy that will make it unnecessary to explain what characterizes a good teacher. More importantly, a clear teaching philosophy is characterized by qualities that define educators suitable for the profession. As Kenya endeavors to be a middle class economy by 2030 (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research- IPAR, 2008), a teaching workforce guided by clear philosophies about their pedagogical practice, is critical for the realization of an education that is not only holistic, but also one that will sustain the social, economic and political development of the country.

The need to theorize and engage with the idea of a teaching philosophy in this paper is due to the fact that, studies on teaching philosophy (ies) available focus on the western context, and therefore there is a need to engage into this very
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