

MATTHEW LIPMAN'S PHILOSOPHY OF CATCH THEM YOUNG: AN IMPERATIVE FOR MORAL AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The indispensability of education is too obvious to ignore. It is a machinery of empowerment: equipping citizens with knowledge, values, attitudes, competence skills and moral in a manner that enables individuals to discover their creative genius thereby taking their place in the culture of productivity of their country. However, this aim of education is truncated by the educational system currently run in Nigeria. Our educational system gives undue credence to academic paper qualifications which are seen as automatic passports to attractive salaries and special status in the society. Examinations are essentially tests of academic ability - the ability of recipients to reproduce retained information on demand - rather than test of reasoning ability, competence and above all moral integrity. The outcome of this has been an immense increase in the number of "bookish scholars" at the expense of reasonable individuals who are critical and responsible, able to think for themselves, making judgment on all issues affecting them and be able to understand and interpret critically government activities, as such making positive impact in the society. This paper with the aid of Matthew Lipman's pedagogical approach attempts to demystify the problem of unreasonableness in our educational system and using critical analysis approach emphasizes that education should equip recipient with critical thinking ability which is better done at tender age.

Keywords: Matthew Lipman, Education, Moral development, Critical thinking

Introduction

Education is primarily about man's growth and development. It is an indispensable tool to human development which in turn aids national development as a whole. The reputable pre-Socratic philosopher, Plato was right in defining education as the process of turning the eye of the soul from darkness to light (Shofield, 1986, p. 35). By this, Plato meant leading a person from the dark cave of ignorance into the limelight of knowledge. It is not putting knowledge in a person's soul as one puts water into an empty pot, but rather it is aiding the individual to discover knowledge through his own reasoning processes from previously acquired knowledge. Thus, one can argue that education is rediscovery of knowledge. Fafunwa (1974) defines education as what each generation gives to its younger ones which makes them develop attitudes, abilities, skills and other behaviours which are the positive values to the society in which they live. According to Amaele et al (2011, p.7) education is the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques, according to

his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society, and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of the society. This paper resonates with this definition of education because it depicts to a reasonable extent the objective of education. Education is never an act of storing information to be regurgitated on demand as it is erroneously conceived contemporarily especially in Nigerian education. But rather, it is a set of activities that aims at developing man holistically through self-realization of his potentialities in order to take his rightful place, and contribute positively to the enhancement of the society.

Nigerian education system has fallen short in achieving the aforementioned objective of education because much emphasis is placed on academic qualifications (certificate), which makes the output of education to be entirely measured in terms of achievement in exams. This has led to overvaluing of book learning; a situation where subjects are taught with the view of storing information to be regurgitated on demand without creating avenue for independent thinking from recipients to solve practical problems of life. Similarly, the focus of the students has been on preparation for examinations and to pass by learning merely what other people have taught. Examinations on the other hand are not conducted with the aim of testing reasoning ability but rather the ability of students to reproduce memorized information. Such scenario is succinctly captured by Lipman (2003, p. 29) when he asserts that:

We no longer live in a time in which education is valued for its own sake. It has value today; most students seem to feel, only as a ticket to enter the job market with a few acceptable credentials. Consequently, education is disposable, like a paper cup— something you acquire for only as long as you need it and throw away when you are done with it. The knowledge one gets in the schools, students feel, is not relevant to life; it is relevant only to the tests that bar one from entering or permit one to enter life. Once a test has been taken, the knowledge needed for it can be forgotten with no more regret than one has in throwing away the paper cup.

The aftermath of Lipman's above assertion particularly in Nigeria has been overvaluing of academic paper qualifications (certificate) with its attendant grievous disaster. Such disaster includes but are not limited to diverse forms of examination malpractices, sex for grades syndrome, intimidation of teachers and lecturers and outright fraud in order to successfully obtain the certificate and above all, inability to think critically, analyze situations, make decisions and proffer solution to societal challenges.

In a setting such as this, it could be argued that there is a pressing need to introduce an activity

that will enhance the students' abilities to critically analyze situations, make judgment on all issues affecting them, and able to understand and interpret critically their environment and government activities, in order to make positive impact. This activity should be the one that will enhance reasonableness in students right from tender age of schooling. This is because children's natural curiosity helps to lay the foundation of reasonableness. The Yoruba in their rich culture – proverbial heritage recognizes this and asserts that: “Ati kekere lati n peka iroko, to ba dagba tan a maa gbebo lowo eni.” Meaning that education of a child at tender age is advantageous, failure of which could take serious sacrifice to tame the child when such has fully grown.

Philosophy as an In-depth rational and intellectual inquiry provides the best response to this quest of critical thinking in education. This is so because philosophy gives students the experience they need for reasoning that is the experience that will prepare them much better than the limited knowledge of other disciplines. The aim of teaching philosophy to children is not to teach them the philosophy of Plato, Socrates and the likes, but rather to develop their thinking, inquiry and reasoning skills and help them to exercise good judgment by means of intellectual interaction and by questioning both with the facilitator/teacher and amongst themselves, thus, creating a community of inquiry of which its essence is mind development. In this milieu, Lipman's Philosophy of catch them young - commonly known Philosophy for Children (P4C) - is an appropriate pedagogical paradigm since it focuses on all aspects of intelligence i.e. intellectual intelligence, moral intelligence and social intelligence. It does this by fostering critical thinking skills, social behaviour and positive personal characteristics on children right from their earliest stages of schooling.

Matthew Lipman's Philosophy of Catch Them Young

Like John Dewey (1859-1952), Matthew Lipman conceives education to be an inquiry; an inquiry that students should carry-out themselves. John Dewey was convinced that education had failed because it was guilty of a stupendous category mistake: it confused the refined, finished end products of inquiry with the raw, crude initial subject matter of inquiry and tried to get students to learn the solutions rather than investigate the problems and engage in inquiry for themselves. Matthew Lipman shared in this view but part company with him in the sense that he didn't think the educational process in the classroom should take as its model the process of scientific inquiry like John Dewey opined (Lipman, 2003, p. 20).

Matthew Lipman (born August 24, 1923 in Vineland, New Jersey, died December 26, 2010 in West Orange, New Jersey) is recognized as the pioneer of Philosophy for Children- a philosophy of catch them young. His decision to bring philosophy to young people sprang from his experience as a professor at Columbia University, where he witnessed underdeveloped reasoning skills in his students in their level of reasoning and discussion of social issues especially the Vietnam War (1954 – 1975). He reasoned that students like these will not become the thoughtful citizens that robust democracies require, nor can they look forward to the productivity and self- respect that they themselves require as individuals (Lipman, 2003, p. 27). His interest was particularly on developing reasoning skills by teaching critical thinking at elementary schools. For him, children are lively, curious, imaginative and inquisitive. With these wonder traits he believes that children possess the ability to think conceptually from an early age. As such bringing critical thinking to children's education earlier would help them to improve their reasoning skills. He reasoned that only philosophy provides all that critical thinking approach can provide, and a great deal more besides. He encapsulates this when he asserts that:

This brings us back to the question of what can be done to produce such thinking. What can be done to make education more critical, more creative, more caring, and more appraisive of its own procedures? My recommendation is that, as a start, we add philosophy to the elementary and secondary school curriculum. Of course, such an addition will not be sufficient. More has to be done to strengthen the thinking that must occur within and among all the disciplines. And of course, when I speak of philosophy at the grade-school level, I do not mean the dry, academic philosophy traditionally taught in the universities (Lipman, 2003).

This it does by concentrating and systematically connecting the skills to one another, instead of teaching isolation and dismembered skills, so that when one thinks about the subject matter of a discipline, one does so in an organized and thorough way. In other words, Lipman proposed the teaching of critical thinking through philosophical question because he believes that philosophy allows comprehensive perspectives which helps to understand the connection and relationship amongst various subjects of study, thereby preventing fragment and discrete of students' education. While the aim of philosophy is to develop thinkers, the objective of philosophy of children, according to him, is not merely to sharpen students' capacities for dry analysis, nor to cumbered the curriculum with new subjects, but to dramatize the life of the

mind so that students will develop critical dispositions as they discuss ideas of mutual concern amongst themselves in the classroom. Hence, there is converting the classroom into a "community of inquiry" where students openly and respectfully exchange ideas. Each student is regarded as having the potential to make valuable contributions to the topics under consideration. Students are encouraged to develop good listening skills, responsiveness to what others say, willingness to try to support one's own ideas with good reasons, and openness to the possibility that one should modify one's beliefs in light of new considerations. In this respect the classroom is designed to reinforce the student's potential for intellectual intelligence, and also to enhance their moral and social intelligence (Sprod 2001; Lipman et al; Lipman and Sharp 1978).

Thus, we can now speak of "converting the classroom into a community of inquiry" in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions (Lipman, 2003, p. 20).

Through this as Lipman has rightly puts Children will learn that all ethical acts must have reasons and that it is well to think of the reason before one engages in the act, because if one does not, one must face the moral censure of one's peers. This is not decision making by mere consensus. The guidance we receive is from a critical community that weighs the reasons for *reasonableness* which is more than conventional learning of mathematics, spellings and grammar. This involves more than being able to engage in skillful reasoning. As Splitter and Sharp (1995, p. 6) put it: "It is through such thinking together that children become reasonable and independent thinkers able to exercise good judgment which produces positive social and moral dispositions." The importance of these as Lipman puts it: is that they prepare students to confront the responsibilities of citizenship and the problems of life; the enhancement is not only in the area actions and not just the actions in isolation (Lipman, 2003, p. 147).

Education and the Nigerian society

Education is an indispensable, yet interwoven phenomenon with national development. Ukeje (1986) is thus apposite in positing education as power; a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and conditions man's attitudes, actions and achievements geared towards developing the recipient's contribution in national reforms. It can be argued that Nigeria is currently in this fiasco state of affairs because of bad leadership with poor

education; poor education that only prepares citizens to pass exams in order to have their own share of the national cake, without being equipped with citizenship skills and values; poor education where examination is a way to ascertain how much of a subject matter in a particular field of study the student has mastered, and memorized; poor education that is deficient in knowledge and innovation to aid the national development of the nation. The problem of poor education has spread like wild fire to every sector of the country, resulting in squalor. This moral degradation manifested itself as national epidemic in form of: unprecedented level of corruption and indiscipline, unpatriotism, abuse of office, unemployment, insurgency and terrorism, electoral violence, political violence, examination malpractice, cultism and gangsterism, un-productivity, low technology development, over-reliance on developed world, exploitation of the masses, poor policy-making, and lack of initiative to implement good policy. No wonder that national development is anything but a mirage in Nigeria since no nation can grow beyond her level of education. The apparent fact these present to us is that our education is devoid of critical thinking and moral education. This is so because the system is so designed in a manner which places premium on training and preparing students to achieve good grades in standardized tests and examinations than being a positive agent of change. Thus, producing “bookish men” as learned men; men who are *gurus* at dispensing information but deficient in critical, creative and moral reasoning and character.

Yet, education is not a matter of dispensing information; it is the process of assisting in the growth of the whole individual holistically especially intellectually and morally, thereby producing a learned and virtuous man who can contribute positively to his own development and that of his society. In consonance with the need for education to produce a virtuous citizen, Locke (1631) asserts that the cultivation of virtue or good morals is absolutely essential for the production of an enlightened gentleman, while Cornenius (1592) sees the aim of education as refining all men to be of quiet manners, so that those who are naturally of a good character should not be corrupted, whereas those who are evil should be recalled to righteousness. The point these philosophers are driving at is that morality is indispensable to education; education cannot take place in the absence of morality. Likewise, there can be no development of any kind without education.

Education an imperative for Moral and National Development

National development is an all-inclusive term which takes account of all aspects of the nation including the life of individuals that made up the nation. It can be described as the overall

development or a collective socio-political, economic, religious advancement of a nation. It is a process of rebuilding and enhancing various components of a nation, i.e. political, social, cultural, economic etc. According to Vaizey and Debeauvis (1965, p. 37), "National development is the total effect of all citizens, forces and addition to stock of physical, human resources, knowledge and skill." UN Decade report sees national development as growth plus change which in turn is social, cultural as well as economic and qualitative as well as quantitative. Expatriating on this definition, Amaele. & Dumani, (2014) assert that the central of development is change which is not only expressed on the infrastructure: that could be described as replacement, addition or growth, but that which is intended to also reflect on attitude, belief and cultures development implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, greater self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing.

The implication is that development is not merely the advancement of infrastructures, but it is rather centered on human dimension. In other words, the cardinal of any national development is human person and his development. For it is impossible to talk about national development without making recourse to human development. Man is a positive asset and a precious natural resource which needs to be cherished, nurtured and developed. This is so because it is only human beings who are capable via their intellects and efforts to harness other nonhuman resources. In other words, the productivity and efficient use of other resources falls within the purview of man. As such, the greatest resource any country has is the human beings, especially human beings with balanced and well integrated education. There can be no development of infra-human aspects without the prior human development. Development of human person consists essentially in the development of his mind and will. The training of the mind to see things critically, and to seek the meaning and intelligibility of things is an important aspect of the development of the human person (Omeregbe, 2012). This however involves education.

Throughout ages and civilizations, education has been the life blood of the age nation; the instrument for emancipation and empowerment, the basis of moral rejuvenation. However, education incomplete if it is devoid of critical thinking and morality. Thus education shares in philosophy's fundamental functions of training of the mind to see things critically and to seek the meaning and intelligibility of things. The connection is not surprising because philosophy and education are two sides of the same coin - human development. Hence, human

development is premised both on philosophy and education. Education is the dynamic and applied side of philosophy; philosophy is wisdom while education transmits that wisdom from one generation to the other. Philosophy provides the principles, theories, ideas etc. and education through its laboratory function tests and makes them concrete and practical to impart man with knowledge and training needed for national development. It transforms man in all aspects by developing his mental power of thinking and enhancing his ability to solve problems such that he is able to lead a meaningful life that positively and constructively contributes to development. The presence of critical thinking and morality in education results in human development that is moral maturity and productivity on the part of citizens. This is because with morality citizens learn to be altruistic, hardworking, humanitarian, responsible, moderation and discipline. Thus, cultivating moral uprightness. With critical thinking the mental muscles are trained and nurtured to see things censoriously proffer solution to problems. Put differently, the unrest, ignorance, poverty, bad governance, unemployment and other underdevelopment syndrome in Nigeria are removable through a balanced and well integrated education; education that comprises critical thinking and positive moral disposition. Thus, Isichei (1999, p. 157) maintains that to teach moral is to teach the meaning and purpose of life. The interwoven nature of these concepts is rightly captured by Pereira (1997) when he argues that development is a moral phenomenon, whose foundation is education of human beings- an education which must, in turn, be moral in order to qualify as true education. Education with morality trains man to become fullest man, fullest in happiness and fulfillment. It enables man to live and attain the full structure of his nature by training him to live alright. This is because education and morality as Omoregbe (2003, p. 147) has rightly observed have the same foundation; human nature. They both center around human nature and are inseparable from it. Not only are they inseparable from human nature, they are also inseparable from each other. Hence education devoid of morality is disastrous both to man and his society. Effective moral education produces moral virtues needed to annihilate and inoculate the social and economic menaces of our dispensation. For development is only possible in a society where men are at peace with one another and work together to harness other resources; a society where men discharge their duties with integrity without being biased, a society where there is probity, transparency and respect for the rule of law.

More often than not, moral education is erroneously taken to be obedience and compliance to given instructions; rule followers. Some even equate it to the academic achiever. Moral person

is distinct from an obedience-compliant person by the disposition of their conscience; moral person feels guilt or remorse on doing something wrong, not because of the fear of being discovered or punished but because one sees oneself as culpable or blame-worthy. An obedient - compliant person, without a guilty conscience do wrong if he was so instructed or did not fear punishment/consequences. However, moral education is more than teaching obedience and compliance. It is largely the training of individual to reflect upon what constitutes a good life and how such can pilot to an acceptable life within a society It is a commitment to honesty, forthrightness, integrity, authenticity, fidelity, accountability, shrewdness respect for others by not hurting or infringing upon the rights of others in any manner, patriotism and selfless citizens. To reflect on these values requires responsible thinking that is sensitive to details. This signifies the interwoven nature of critical thinking and moral education. Buttressing this relationship further Beyer (1995) argues that to live successfully in a democracy, people must be able to think critically in order to make sound decisions about personal and civic affairs. If students learn to think critically, then they can use good thinking as the guide by which they live their lives. Being morally upright is not enough to qualify one as educated man. Simply put education with morality but devoid of critical thinking is superficial likewise education with critical thinking but exclusive of morality is odious. And so, there is an intricate connection between critical thinking and morality that one is dependent on the other.

Critical thinking gives room for the in-depth reflection that searches for meaning; meaning geared towards solving problem. It involves the ability to be original, innovative, and creative in our thinking, while other individuals' ideas could serve as building block to our innovativeness, instead of being a merely echoer of other people's ideas. Thomas A. Angelo (1995, p. 6) sees critical thinking as the intentional application of rational, higher order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem solving, inference, and evaluation". Critical thinking affords students the opportunity to explore ideas, question underlying assumptions, interact meaningfully with educational materials e.g. texts and curriculum artifacts, and participate in construction of knowledge with their peers and teachers. With critical thinking, one is taught to observe what is there to be observed, appreciate what is of value, understand what is stated, figure out what is assumed, infer what is implied, grasp what is suggested, and construe what is being attempted. Moral education socializes, trains, nurtures and inculcates students with values and virtues that make for good citizenship; integrity, courage, responsibility, diligence, service, and respect for the dignity of

all persons and work, honesty, and kindness, peaceful and harmonious coexistence of different ideologies and ethnic groups. Developing these positive attitudes goes a long way in acting as antidote against social evils in Nigeria. With critical thinking skill, students are equipped with proficient reasoning skills that can be applied to any situation in life that calls for reflection, analysis planning and decisions making. This starts from solving problems in class coursework through reflection, analysis planning and decisions making to facing existent world situations. Indoctrination and memorization prevalence in our education are curbed. Thereby making student to think out of the box, become more independent and self-directed learners. Knowing that nothing improves critical thinking skills like discussion, in correspondence to Lipman's view we advocate for scenario where students could discuss amongst themselves in the classroom forming a community of inquiry especially at younger age.

Conclusion

The importance of education to any nation's growth and development cannot be hyped; it is the bedrock of any meaningful development in any country. However, education is yet to assume this primary role in Nigeria. Reason being that education in Nigeria is devoid of critical and moral thinking which are essential for it to fulfill its roles. Chunk of problems in Nigeria are problems related to unemployment and moral decadence. The current system of education prepares recipients to be job seekers as such gives credence to academic qualification and its attendant evil at the expense of effectual rationality and moral development on the part of recipients. Education with critical thinking enhances self-realization and strengthens the mind of the recipients with the ability and capacity to create ideas and innovation that are of positive impact and entrepreneurial-oriented thereby abating the menace of unemployment. Similarly, education with moral contents awakes moral consciousness and instill moral values in recipients. As such abating moral decadence in the country. Obviously, education is both a critical and moral enterprise and should be taken as such for there to be national development in Nigeria. The inculcation of critical and moral thinking in education will lead to productivity, being responsible and patriotic on the part of recipients which invariably lead to national development. As such we advocate that students should be given a well-balanced and integrated education comprising of critical thinking and moral education from tender age.

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