

HAVE MODERN PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION INFLUENCED MAJOR ALTERATIONS IN EDUCATION?

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ABSTRACT

George Knight's dissatisfaction with Christian schools employing secular philosophies or applying dominant secular philosophy because of the dictates of the social system, makes a departure from one's philosophy directing educational practices. He said it this way: "What goes by the name Christian education is sometimes a program of 'pagan' education with a chocolate coating of Christianity" (p. 164). Such a strong perspective earmarks the fact that educational practices are driven by one's philosophy; yet the Christian philosophy is not reflected in its educational system. The fact is, the Christians' reality is not the same as that of non-Christian and, therefore, cannot be the same philosophy, which is the root of building an educational system on one's philosophical perspective. Undoubtedly, modern philosophies have impacted current educational practices. The examples are 1) using technology in teaching instead of only chalkboard; 2) designing educational materials based on the child's level; 3) taking students on field trips; 4) employing students-centered learning styles; 5) helping students to interpret their reality, situation, and how to explore issues; 6) role-playing; and 7) a philosophic framework that is God-centered.

KEYWORDS: Education, Christian Education, Philosophy Of Education, Educational Paradigm.

CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

In order to understand and recognize the direct and indirect impact of philosophy-traditional and modern-on educational practices, one must first be brought into a discourse of the role of education in socialization-the social system. Talcott Parsons' theory about a social system can be applied to an organization. Parsons (1951) believes that a social system is a subset of a

micro-system and each actor, group, and/or individual, is operating for his/her selfish orientation; but must consider others' expectation in order to attain his/her goal-orientation. He then presents a social system as a complex set of interrelationships among humans. He went on to state that there are two types of interrelation among humankind:

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1) influence of one's behaviour on another person, and 2) system boundaries. Those boundaries vary by degrees of openness or closeness. An open-system is said to be how much interaction exists with the actor and the environment/surrounding. When there is general conformity among the social actors, this is called a social equilibrium. It is a state of rest and this does not mean a stationary point, but a relative state of balance. Hence, social equilibrium means that the social actors can change their role-expectation; but the change is minor and do not cause disequilibrium in the society. This is no difference in an organization among the actors/employees, and small changes do not influence or topple the structure. It means that change is allowed in the functioning of a social system, an organization, a group, but that this does not create a transformation of the organization's structure or culture. If a change in an organization causes a decline in performance or productivity, this is referred to as a dysfunctional effect. But if the change does not alter the functional normalcy of the organization, this is considered as functional effect.

In an organization, there is plurality as it relates to the psychological context. Psychologically, the employee expects to perform the required task as stipulated by the manager/ leader and for this role, he/she expects the organization to provide monetary (i.e. economic) and non-monetary compensation (i.e., respect, being involved in decision-making, promotion, personal satisfaction with system, etc.). Such a reality means that people are acting in accordance with the expectation of others, which constitutes the social culture. Social interaction among people, in keeping with others expectations and culture is the traditional behaviour of people in the society.

An organization is a collection of people from different socio-political background, which creates cultural diversity. When these culturally diverse people are grouped into a locality, they will form sub-groups based on their cultural

diversity, as they can more relate with people of similar kind such as gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and customs. Nevertheless, they are expected to offer themselves in the performance of specialized tasks as is stipulated by their job description and to which they expect reasonable remuneration. Employees will work hard only because of the expected benefits. The hard work that they exert is referred to as work ethic and this is mostly due to the expected outcome from the organization – compensation (i.e., economic and non-economic). The role of the employee is not in isolation, it is in relation to others - organic solidarity because of task-division.

Task-division means job division and so there is specialization in task, with each person performing a fraction of the entire job. This is a clear case of responsibility differentiation based on role-status. The concept of status is socially derived or constructed, is understood by others in the group, and implies rank. Status also implies hierarchy and comes with power, money, and privilege based on one's status or rank in the group or organization. The power-rank comes with entitlement and influence, and others within the group socially accept the power-relation of the status in the group dynamics. Additionally, status implies role and social responsibility. Organizational culture is the set of assumptions, values, beliefs, symbols, and norms that are practiced by the members of the group, entity, or organization. Simply put, they are blue-fingerprints that provide the framework or guidelines for the behaviour of those within the group or sub-unit.

Humankind formulate various social agencies and they must also interact with the physical environment. It means, therefore, that the social system is an interaction among people as well as with their environment (Senge, 2006). The concept of school is an educational training organization that is set up primarily to impart knowledge, skills, and competences among its residents, so that they can effectively function in

their social and physical environment. Thus, a school is an open system as it must interact with the outside society-institutions and people beyond or outside of their premises. As such, all schools are open systems, with the degree of openness being the issue, and not closed system. Lunenburg (2010) puts it this way “All schools are open systems, although the degree of interaction with their environment may vary.” In fact, schools cannot divorce themselves from the wider community as they are called upon to constantly interact with the outside environment for socio-economic and physical support-in the form of finances, human capital, and security of the premises (Scott, 2008).

Parsons (1951) indicated in the discussion on social system, with an extensive discussion of subsystem, in particular the actor and his/her role in structure, that the actor has an orientation which evolves from his/her socialization,

orientation, and interaction with other actors early in life. Parsons argued that even though the actor is oriented by cultural experience, there is still allowance for the collective conscience to come into play. He stated that the activity of the actor is referred to as an ‘action,’ and the action is “a process in the actor-situation system which has motivational significance to the individual actor or in the case of a collectivity, its component individuals”(p. 4). The educational system plays a critical role in maintaining social actors in the social system. Sociologists (Haralambus and Holborn, 2002; Macionis, 2012; Macionis and Plummer, 1998; Anderson and Taylor, 2009), refer to education as a vehicle by which the society’s beliefs, values, and philosophies are transmitted. In fact, each social actor in society learns the system from another social actor, and this means that learning or knowledge is transmitted in social settings (Bandura, 1977).

ENVIRONMENT

ORGANIZATION

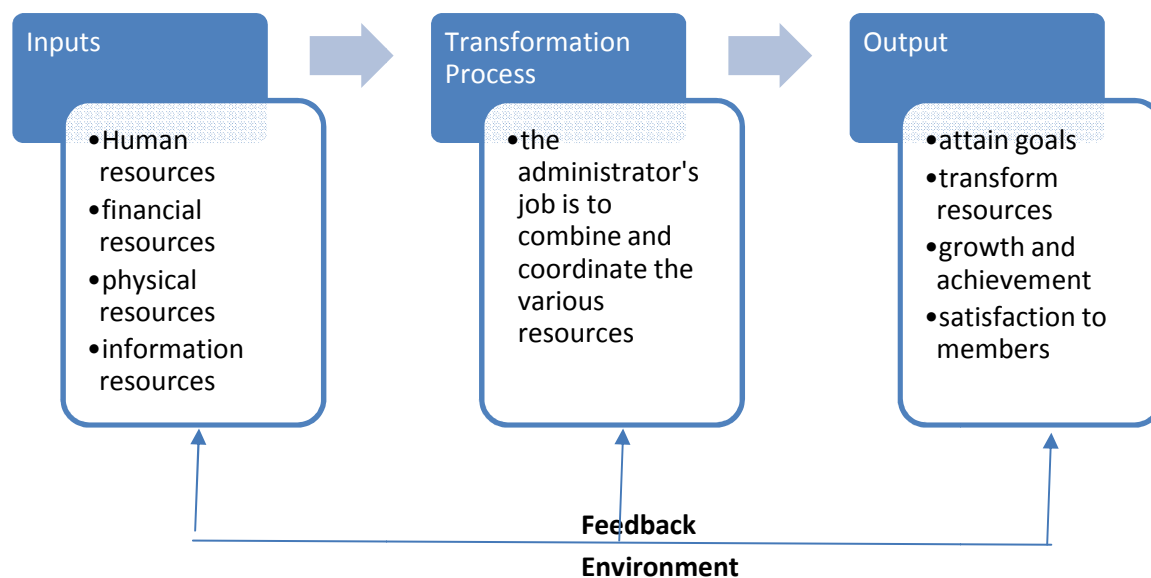


Figure 1. Open System (Lunenburg, 2010, 2)

Interestingly, Lunenburg’s flow diagram aptly shows the environment that surrounds the school and as such must be brought into a discussion of

a school/ education system. It is the wider environment-social, political, and economic institutions-that set the standards for schools

and, therefore, they cannot be gods unto themselves as they are accountable to those institutions. The accountability of the school means they will provide the outside environment with information or feedback and this will be a dual and continuous process. Despite those facts, Lunenburg contends that the politics in schools, for example, in the school boards and teachers unions, may thwart the needed accountability (mandated policies) set out by the political administrations. The author explains that inputs are obtained from within and outside of the school. They are transformed by way of feedback from the society, and the interaction between the teacher and pupils will produce a certain output.

This sets the premise for how philosophies affect the social actors (educational, economic, political, and social institutions), and the school is just one of the many sub-systems. Simply put, the educational systems are impacted upon and carry-out the general philosophy of the social system. The educational sub-system is a created from the overall system and its primary function is to train all social actors (i.e. people) into the acceptable practices and requirements of the general social system. It follows, therefore, that the dominant philosophical viewpoint and cosmology will be the driving force behind the educational apparatus. The educational sub-system will only socialize or indoctrinate people or the social actors into practicing those paradigms.

The curricula, students, instructional methodology, and other functions within a school all reflect of the dominant philosophy, epistemology, and axiology of the wider social system. "...the school [is] primarily an institution for transmission of past knowledge to future generations" (Knight, 2006, p. 83), which is supporting the general theme of the educational system being a subsystem of the general system and, therefore, carries out the mandate of this social structure. This means that the educational

subsystem does not operate in isolation of the general social system and in fact it is just the socialization arm of this structure as it relates to values, philosophy and epistemology.

It can be deduced from the system argument as well as that of Knight that education is merely transmitting the established or agreed philosophy of the general social studies. So, when Knight wrote "Both existentialism and pragmatism have affected recent education" (p. 83), this goes without saying and is equally applicable to all traditional and modern philosophy. The fact is, the philosophical perspective of the general social system directly impacts the educational system and this should come as no surprise to readers.

Historically, there is ample evidence that during the era, a religious philosophy was dominant or the normal way of thinking, and the educational system promulgated and reflected this paradigm. By reading social Darwinism perspective (Microsoft Corporation, 2000), when Darwin began questioning the religious paradigm, it was the dominant paradigm taught in schools, fashioned teacher-training, value system, behavior and attitude, and how we interpret reality and existence. This reality means that the education system is an agency of 'indoctrination' of established philosophies and axiology. The educational system is simply training people about past knowledge and socializing them to accept and practice this thinking. Just like a fetus who relies on his mother for survival, before it is able to become an independent being, each actor in society is directly linked to the educational system for much of its knowledge.

It is during this time that the educational system, which is a reflection of the general social system, transmits all the messages of the system to infants, children and adults. All the social actors are, therefore, carrying out the will, desire and purpose of the social system, and this is accomplished by way of the educational sub-

system as well as other sub-systems. It should be noted here that when Social Darwinism revolutionized thinking on existence, the educational system reflected this paradigm and prior thinking was changed in schools because of the then philosophical perspective.

The presented processes have continued for centuries, and the educational system is also impacted upon by the dominant philosophy. With the advent of modern philosophies such as reconstructionism, postmodernism, feminism, and existentialism, the educational system has begun to reflect different degrees of each, with traditional philosophies such as idealism, realism, and Neo-Scholasticism bearing more fruits only because of the dominance of those paradigms. The rationale of their dominance on the educational system is simply because the social system hold those traditional philosophies highly when compared to modern ones. It follows, therefore, that the remnants of the traditional philosophies have continued to directly and profoundly impact upon the educational practices in contemporary societies, in spite of their failures. In Jamaica, education challenges have been listed as the fourth leading national problem and this speaks to the ongoing critical review of the system. Yet society holds in high esteem the traditional philosophies, and they continue to chart practices in this system.

Some schools in Jamaica are experimenting with aspects of modern philosophies. The reality is, they must surrender somehow to the social system's accepted paradigm and so they substantially utilize the traditional philosophies-including curricula, teacher-training, thinking, and students' evaluation. The social system is still the dominant force and overrides deviances by individuals. Unless the social system has accepted a new philosophy, innovative educators are on the sideline using their paradigm; but, they must subscribe to the social system's demands. In fact, the classrooms and furniture arrangement, teaching-methodology, curricula, books, and

students' evaluation are generally supporting the social system, which explains the reason behind why deviant social actors are either sidelined, destroyed or having to return to the social system's paradigm. An issue of note is, in Jamaica, individuality (existentialism) is not emphasized, and is struggling to take a foothold in the system, even though it has been known to add more value to the educational process than the traditional philosophies.

Jamaica's educational system is a fragmented sub-system of many philosophies and yet the traditional teaching methodology plays a critical role in educational practices only because the social system still holds this a dominant paradigm. All other philosophies are lowly employed, on the outskirts of the social system, as the general social structure has not embraced the modern philosophies. Although many modern philosophies have emerged for usage in educational practices, they are experimentally employed with little notoriety. This offers an explanation as to why teacher-training, classroom structure, textbook, curricula, students' evaluation, and the behavior and attitude of people are expressions of the dominant philosophy of the social system.

Generally, Jamaican schools are able to modify the traditional teaching methodology or paradigm in the teaching-learning process; but overall they are covertly engrafted back into the old paradigm because of things like the established examinations-Grade 4 Literacy and Numeracy Test; Grade Six Achievement Test; Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC); Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). It is, therefore, difficult for the single sub-system to totally reject or use an alternative philosophy to impact on its educational practices. For that reason, Church schools are more in line with the social system than having a Christian philosophy. Because of the challenges of Christian schools to adopt to Christian philosophy to impact their educational

practices, Knight laments how they are rubber stamped secular philosophies. He contended that "Perhaps the greatest need of Christian schools is a philosophical foundation that is truly Christian" (p. 167). It can be deduced from the previous perspective that the Christian philosophy is not impacting upon the educational practices of Christian schools, when one's philosophy must directly influence attitude, behavior, and practices.

Knight's dissatisfaction with Christian schools employing secular philosophies or applying dominant secular philosophy because of the dictates of the social system, make a departure from one's philosophy directing educational practices. He said it this way "What goes by the name Christian education is sometimes a program of 'pagan' education which a chocolate coating of Christianity" (p. 164). Such a strong perspective earmarks the fact that educational practices are driven by one's philosophy; yet the Christian philosophy is not reflected in their educational system. The fact is, the Christians' reality is not the same as that of non-Christian and, therefore, cannot be the same philosophy, which is the root of building your educational system on your philosophical perspective.

Because "educational practices are conditioned by philosophic beliefs, teachers, parents, and other educators develop unnecessary difficulties when their practices conflict with the worldview that they are seeking to transmit to youth in their charge" (Knight, 2006, 197). and those issues will be the force that influence an individual's behavior. The results are in, philosophy or worldview substantially influences behavior, attitude and educational system and this is a justification as to why Christians should be mindful of the schools they send their children. And so, I concur with Knight that Christian schools should not align themselves to secular philosophies as this is contradictory to their desired learning outcomes and knowledge. Undoubtedly, modern philosophies have still

impact on current educational practices. The examples are 1) the use of technology in teaching instead of only chalkboard; 2) designed educational materials based on the child's level; 3) field trips; 4) employing students' centered learning styles; 5) students interpret their reality, situation and explore issues; 6) role-playing, and 7) a philosophic framework that is God-centered.

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