

A Teaching Philosophy for Effective Teaching and Learning in Schools

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Personal Biography

My name is Nickson Moseti Ongaki. I am a Kenyan young academician who has made significant contributions to the studies of human resource management and business administration. I was born in Kisii highlands in 1982. I remained there as I grew up and was educated in public schools. In high school I made several outstanding innovations and inventions that I managed to present during Science Congress to national level. I decided to seek academic careers, against my family's wishes. Both went on to attend Moi University, pursued a career in academics, ultimately becoming a banker, and teacher. I initially sought a bachelor's degree in education. Later, I decided to become an entrepreneur. After graduation in 2005, I attended summer school and took a masters course in Business Administration. I enrolled at the Jomo Kenyatta University of science, Agriculture and technology as a PHD student. I became a part time lecturer at Mount Kenya University after receiving my master degree. I described myself as being self-conscious, inarticulate, and innovative in my classes. I'm proud to say this new role suits me. I'm driven, not to do great things for myself, but to spur my society on to even greater ones. I am married to Faith Wavinya; we have 2 children, Linnah and Amma.

ABSTRACT

This is a theoretical paper that attempts to highlight the importance of an educator's "personal teaching philosophy". Whereas there are myriad reasons for an educator's teaching philosophy, the need to explore this paper is informed by the complex nature our educational institutions are getting into in terms of diversity, students' awareness of their rights, ethnicity and negative ethnicity, information technology, moral decadence, capitalism and commodification of the educational enterprise, international competitiveness in both teaching and learning among others. Additionally, an initial library and internet search by the author on scholarly literature and journal articles on the topic revealed nothing on the topic, other than online definitions.

The author argues that much as educators are busy carrying out their duties, sometimes with much diligence, hardly do they stop to reflect on what it is that informs or what should inform their practice. Hence, a personal teaching philosophy will guide an educator in making implications for both theory and practice. To foreground the need for a teaching philosophy, this paper is guided by the following research questions: 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? What characterizes a clear teaching philosophy? And finally, what are the recommendations this study foregrounds that can inform: theory, policy and practice?



Initial findings from this theoretical paper serve to inform and challenge educators that any effective teaching must be informed by a self-reflective statement about one's beliefs, values and about what you believe about your learners. The study has also laid a foundation for a field research to investigate what informs educators in their practice – a search for a teaching philosophy among educators and peers.

KEY WORDS:

Teaching, Philosophy, Education, Educators, Goals, Objectives, philosophical framework, Critical reflection

Introduction

A teaching philosophy is a self-reflective statement of one's beliefs about teaching and learning. It discusses how one puts his beliefs into practice by including concrete examples of what he does or anticipates doing in the classroom.

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)

In the wake of many challenges facing the teacher and the teaching profession (Kibera & Kimokoti, 2007, Kombo, 2006), an intriguing question is “what keeps teachers/educators going in spite of everything”? A growing body of evidence indicates that teachers who lack well defined self reflective views about why they are in the teaching 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 (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002; Kreber, 2005). 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; UMN, 2009).

More critically is the fact that studies available focus on the western context, and hence the need to engage into this very important perspective of teaching in third world contexts and Africa in particular. Also, as this study argues, lack of a well defined teaching philosophy might translate into educators who teach for the sake of a pay check or even portray the teaching profession as an enduring career.

As pointed out by one of the most successive educators in Kenya's history, the late Griffin – founder, and until his death the Director Starehe Boys' Center, Nairobi:

This world is full of people who do their duty half-heartedly, grudgingly and poorly and impunitively... Whatever is your duty, do it as fully and perfectly as you possibly can. ... Follow my advice in this and I promise you that your lives will be happy and successful. May God bless you all ([in italics added] (Kariuki & Wambugu, 2007, p. iv).

Teaching in the 21st C calls for a rethinking of the teaching/learning process that will necessitate educators to teach from a perspective that rises above the challenges facing the profession. More specifically, in the 21st C an educator is faced with issues of cross-cultural and multicultural identities, issues of diversity and inclusiveness abound, emphasis on the rights of a child to include education rights, challenges associated with the international declaration on free and compulsory education – EFA among others (Convention on the Rights of a Child, 1989; UNESCO, 1990, 2000, UN, 2001). This paper aims at examining what it takes or should take for educators in the current context and century to keep the teaching banner high.

What is a teaching philosophy?

Failure to come up with journal articles and textbooks that have defined “a teaching



philosophy”, the author turned onto online sources for a beginning with the full knowledge of their sometimes anecdotal nature and invalidation. Online sources however, served as good references to foreground the topic as explained in the following definitions.

- ❖ A teaching philosophy is a self reflective statement of your beliefs about teaching and learning...It is a statement that discusses how you put your beliefs [about teaching] in practice by including concrete examples of what you do or anticipate doing in the classroom (University of Minnesota).
- ❖ A critical reflection that informs the scholarship of teaching [learning] (Kreber, 2005). Kreber is one among many scholars who have “refrained” from using the phrase “a teaching philosophy”, but his research work titled Reflection on teaching and the scholarship of teaching powerfully points to a teaching philosophy as argued in this paper.
- ❖ A philosophical framework of your personal approach to teaching and the rationale behind what guides your practice i.e. what impacts on you as an educator and how it influences your teaching (O’Farrell, 2009)

A general theme emerging from the various definitions is that although some scholars view it as part of a dossier in the process of a job search in the teaching profession, a perceived and internalized teaching philosophy should help an educator to be continually reflective and aim at his/her teaching in both theory and practice. As argued by Kreber (2005), it should be a critical reflection that informs an educator’s teaching and scholarship.

What is the purpose of a teaching philosophy?

As generally understood and widely used especially in developed countries (UMN), an initial purpose of a teaching philosophy is usually an initial requirement for hiring a prospective

educator and a written way of introducing oneself to colleagues (UMN, 2009; Stronge & Hindman, 2003). However, as the author argues in this study and literature supports (Kreber, 2005; Nieto, 2003), an educator’s teaching philosophy should be viewed as an ongoing reflection that guides, informs, corrects ones belief about teaching and learning. Additionally, a teaching philosophy should be viewed a powerful tool for professional growth as it will inevitably be making an educator put into question his/her own beliefs about her/his practice both in time and in context. As argued in the article from the UMN website on a teaching philosophy, “as you attempt to enact your beliefs about teaching and learning, you may realize that there is a lot of room for growth (¶ 7)

More importantly, an analysis from the various definitions of a teaching philosophy portray the following as key objectives of a teaching philosophy:

- ❖ Provide evidence of your sincerely held beliefs about teaching
- ❖ Guide your pedagogical thinking at a particular point in time
- ❖ Help you critically examine your teaching practices
- ❖ Monitor your career development as n educator
- ❖ Positively impact your learners, colleagues and the academy

What should inform an educator’s teaching philosophy

Available literature (Kreber, 2005; Nieto, 2003; UMN, 2009) point to the fact that envisioning a teaching philosophy can be a difficult task. Indeed, in developed countries “a step-by step guide” is provided to guide educators in drafting their teaching philosophies (UMN, 2009). A critical educationists, scholar and author Sonia Nieto (2003) posed this question “what



keeps teachers [teaching in vulnerable learners and contexts] going”? (p.15). As she further argued and helped to respond to her own question, such students it is unfortunate that such learners and contexts hardly get educators who are in the profession just because they qualify. But her study with small group of teachers teaching in inner city schools in Boston-USA, revealed very perplexing findings about educators who had made the greatest difference academically and socially in learners as characterized by the following qualities [or do I call them values and beliefs]:

- ❖ Teachers who believed in the learners potential for success
- ❖ Teachers who refused to accept anything less than the best from them
- ❖ Teachers who were dedicated to improving the lives of the vulnerable
- ❖ Teachers who had been involved in movements for social justice – including movements outside education]
- ❖ Teachers who had childhood experiences of being marginalized in education
- ❖ Teachers who demonstrated love for their students
- ❖ Teachers who demonstrated hope and possibility in their learners regardless of their vulnerability
- ❖ Teachers who constantly engaged in intellectual work in what Nieto quoted one of the teachers as having put it this way ‘adult conversations about unasked questions’
- ❖ Teachers who believed in themselves and in their ability to shape the future.
- ❖ Teachers who demonstrated anger and desperation [not to the students], but at the injustices their students had to endure such as poverty [in our context, over and above poverty, lack of enough teaching learning

resources, strikingly large class sizes, learning under trees, orphaned learners, HIV/AIDS infected and affected learners, Internally Displaced learners (IDLs).....

- ❖ Teachers who demonstrated democratic practice – a commitment to social justice – the ideals of democracy, fair play, and equality

Although each of the above qualities would qualify for a PhD thesis independently, the author feels obliged to reflect on Nieto’s observations regarding the last characteristic – demonstrating democratic practice as it is a characteristic that highly informs my teaching philosophy . As Nieto argued:

discussions of [vulnerable learners] often place sole responsibility on the children and their families, as if the problems had sprung full blown from them alone. Rather than the children [learners] lacking will or being of unsound moral Character, ...it is the schools that often lack the will and the resources to teach these children (p. 17).

Above characters by Nieto can be well summarized in the words from one of the participants in her study as she noted, “It seems old fashioned to speak of teaching as love, yet teachers in the inquiry group often used this word to describe how they feel about their students and the subject matter that they teach” (p. 16). Nieto quoted one of the teacher’s reflections on his beliefs about teaching as follows:

Preceding everything else in teaching is ‘a fundamental belief in the lives and minds of the students’. Love, then, is not simply a sentimental conferring of emotion. Rather, it is a combination of trust, confidence, and faith in students and a deep admiration for their strengths (p.16).



Other ways and or factors that inform or should inform a teaching philosophy are:

- ❖ Institution's ethos, culture and subcultures
- ❖ Emphasis of a specific discipline
- ❖ Time and contextual factors
- ❖ International and National Educational goals
- ❖ Individual spiritual and moral values
- ❖ Intuition

To wrap up this section is a sample of quotes from some practicing educators – starting with the author's developed 5 years ago.

- My love for teaching informs my teaching philosophy.

To this day, I do not know why I wanted to become a teacher. Yet, I adore my career and can it all over again if I had to do it [with the exception of human medicine which is my second career model of choice]. With the exception of two or three educators, being of “the old school”, I did not go through educators who I can refer to as having been role models with certainty. I am however, glad that through their hands, I acquired literacy that today culminated into a profession I adore. My love for teaching has grown with time as I continually learn the complexity of the profession. Specifically, I have learnt that teachers who leave a legacy to their students do more than make learners master subject matter. Rather, good teachers can be measured by the overall positive influence they impact in their learners both in the short and the long term.

- My philosophy of teaching evolved from many years of teaching experience. As I reflect on my beliefs regarding teaching and learning, I find that my mission as a teacher is threefold:

- i) To promote positive learning
- ii) To spark learner enthusiasm for learning
- iii) To provide a strong foundation for life long learning

To accomplish this, I enjoy applying a wide variety of strategies based on essential educational principles encompassing cognitive functioning, learning theory, diversity issues, instructional planning and assessment.... Following these basic principles helped me grow in my love for teaching and learning. More importantly, I have discovered that, by sharing my passion for teaching and learning, and using these principles with enthusiasm and empathy connects with learners. As a result, teaching with clarity, passion, empathy, and sincere enthusiasm, effectively imparts learners, ultimately connecting them to their passion and lifelong learning (Professor of Education)

- Over the course of my twelve years as a college instructor, my approach to student education has shifted from an emphasis on my *teaching*, to a more central focus on *student learning*, and finally, to a more holistic realization that the two are inseparable aspects of the same whole...I define teaching and learning as a holistic process in which there is a co-creation of meaning between student and teacher. In order to accomplish this ‘co-creation of meaning,’ I struggle constantly to balance five basic classroom dialectics:

giving knowledge and facilitating understanding, theory and application, helping and challenging, maintaining rigor and encouraging creative experimentation, and respecting and supporting a wide diversity of students and students' needs while maintaining balance and fairness (Speech communication teacher)



Implementing a teaching philosophy

Having a teaching philosophy is a beginning of a long career development process that requires implementation in order to build improve in ones professional practice. No other contexts can be effective in this process than in the educational contexts. An initial starting point as pointed out in one of the online literature (UMN, 2009) is to discuss it with your colleagues and employer. However, I would be quick to point out that discussing it is not to redirect your personal beliefs/teaching philosophy, but more to improve it and get more insights from experienced scholars.

Secondly, behind an educator's teaching philosophy and indeed in any educational enterprise is the desire to improve practice for improved academic achievement and the holistic efficacy of the learner. Hence, a teaching philosophy should inform the following: Instructional strategies/teaching methods, content taught complexity of content and student engagement in the teaching/learning process (Stronge & Hindman, 2003).

O'Farrell (2009) commenting on how to write a teaching philosophy noted that a teaching philosophy is not a utopian vision but a sincere personal expression situated within the contextual reality in which you teach. To this end, he therefore argued that in practice an educator should be able to portray aspects such as evidence of sincerely held beliefs, provide scholarly evidence of ones sincerely held beliefs both from theoretical and practical research studies. A practical example is like: If you say that my classrooms are learner-centered, one should be able to show practically how she does it.

What characterizes [or should characterize] a clear teaching philosophy

Since the classical days, classical educators such as Aristotle (384- 322 BC), John the Baptist De Lasalle (1709) envisioned some descriptions and virtues that characterize an effective educator. According to Socrates, a teacher is

more important than a biological parent as expressed in his famous quote "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). By implication, for an educator to impart "the art of living well", he/she must be guided by well and sound principles that go beyond teaching as usual and above any mediocrity in the process of teaching and learning. Similarly, in the early 18th C, Christian scholars and educators such as John the Baptist De Lasalle (1709), highlighted on a dozen virtues of a good teacher as [educator] outlined below:

A Reflection on the Virtue of Gravity: According to De Lasalle, at the start of the day or during a quiet time before class, a teacher should read the following statements to self pausing after each to reflect on [his/her] own experiences with the learners. As he pointed out, this reflection and virtue of gravity would be characterized by: self assuredness/confidence, serenity, checked and less speech of moderate tone of vice, saying nothing bitter or crude or offensive to anyone. Further, a teacher possessing the virtue of gravity seeks "to win students' confidence, to know the virtues they may possess, to discern their vices and defects, in order to correct them. De Lasalle's view of a teacher possessing the virtue of gravity was summarized by the following biblical quote "In closing, reflect on the Scriptures: "Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censored" (Titus 2:7-8).

Another virtue of a good teacher according to De Lasalle are: A Reflection on the Virtue of silence. In De Lasalle's view silence is a virtue that leads the teacher to avoid speaking when she or he should not speak and to speak when she or he should not be silent. The virtue of silence "teaches the art of being silent and that of speaking opportunely. Thus, it causes the teacher to avoid two opposite defects that it condemns: taciturnity [not at all talkative] and loquacity [very talkative]." It is therefore important for a teacher to entertain a dialogical process in the teaching and learning process.



A Reflection on the Virtue of Humility. As argued by De Lasalle, humility makes teachers glad to share their knowledge with young people. They show great zeal in evangelizing the poor and in instructing young people. Further, humility of good teachers makes them courageous, and do not turn away from whatever may be lowly and uninviting in the schools and in the students. Humility makes good teachers treat both their colleagues and their students with esteem, cordiality, friendliness, and kindness. Humility makes good teachers endure without chagrin the confusion that their mistakes, blunders, and lack of success may draw down on them.

Finally, humility of good teachers makes them charitable, affable, obliging, and easy to approach, especially by the poor and those whom they might find less interesting to deal with.

A Reflection on the Virtue of prudence is another virtue of a good teacher as envisaged

by De Lasalle. Prudence is a virtue that makes us understand what we need to do and what we to avoid. Teachers should take care to use the different elements that prudence includes as follows: memory, that you apply to the future the experiences of the past, intelligence, that you fully grasp the subject matter and know how best to impart it to your students, docility, that you will not undertake anything of importance without consulting the experts and learning about yourself, that you carry out a project or lesson in a way that insures the success of what you undertake, reasoning, that you reason correctly in order to avoid errors, foresight, that you wisely arrange the means that lead to the desired end, circumspection, that you thoroughly examine a lesson plan before using it, precaution, that you regulate your external conduct to eliminate the possibility of blame, scandal and injustice To emphasize on the virtue of prudence, De Lasalle used a biblical reference: "Therefore I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me" (Wisdom 7:7).

A Reflection on the Virtue of Wisdom. To encompass the virtue of wisdom, De Lasalle recommended that, at the start of the day or during a quiet time before class, read the following statements to yourself, pausing after

each to reflect on your own experiences that called for the virtue of wisdom and how you might strive to more fully incorporate the virtue of wisdom into your teaching or parenting style. Wisdom is a virtue that gives you knowledge of the most exalted things through the most excellent principles so that you may act accordingly. To instruct young people with greater benefit, wisdom requires that you practice the virtues that you want to cultivate in your students such as leading your students to choose rightly and to persevere in every enlightened choice. Help your students fulfill their obligations and works toward God, toward themselves, and toward others. In closing, reflect on the Scriptures: "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting" (James 1:5-6).

A Reflection on the Virtue of Patience. As a virtue, a teacher should incorporate the virtue of patience into your teaching or parenting style: Patience is a virtue that helps you overcome, without murmuring and with submission to the will of God, all the trials of this life, especially the cares inseparable from the education of young people. Patience prevents all outbursts during trying occasions. Opposed to the virtue of patience are offensive, crude words; rough, harsh language; violent or excessive actions; and unjust punishments. Patience soothes your pains and calms your mind; it banishes spells of sadness; it forbids bitter words, spiteful remarks, ill humor, discouragement, worry, unreasonable over-eagerness, bustle, and haste. To support the importance of this virtue is the following biblical text: reflect on the Scriptures: "And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them" (1Thessalonians, 5:14).

A Reflection on the Virtue of Reserve: De Lasalle viewed virtue of reserve as a virtue that helps you think, speak, and act with moderation, discretion, and modesty. Reserve consists in controlling yourself in circumstances that might lead you to grow angry or upset. Reserve requires you to act everywhere and at all times in consideration of the innocence of the children,



their impressionability, and their tendency to act up. Reserve is acquired by cultivating a balanced view of things, by moderating your desires and fears, and by preparing ourselves for all eventualities. Proverbs 4:23,26 affirm the need for virtue of reserve as follows: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure".

A Reflection on the Virtue of Gentleness: De Lasalle viewed gentleness as a virtue that inspires one with goodness, sensitivity, and tenderness. He further explained four kinds of gentleness of the: mind, which consists in judging without harshness, without passion, without considering your own merit and your supposed superiority. Gentleness of the heart, which makes us want things without being stubborn about it and seeks them in a righteous manner, gentleness of your manner, which consists in behaving according to good principles without wanting to reform others over whom we have no authority, gentleness of your conduct, which makes us act with simplicity and uprightness, not contradicting others without reasonable cause, as gentleness restrains our fits of anger, smothers our desires for vengeance, and makes us face with a calm soul the misfortunes, disappointments, and other trials that can happen to us. Mathew 11:29-30, summarizes the importance of gentleness as a virtue - "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"

A Reflection on the Virtue of Zeal: To practice this virtue, De Lasalle viewed zeal as a virtue that makes us bring about the glory of God with great enthusiasm and affection, teach young people by imitating Jesus Christ, who began by doing before teaching as the shortest path is that of example. Children learn more by seeing than by hearing. Next, instruct by solid teaching as follow: Teach young people those things that will enable them to know, love, and serve God. Finally, your zeal must be charitable and courageous; thus it makes you act with strength and gentleness--with strength because it is magnanimous and incapable of getting

discouraged when encountering pains and difficulties; with gentleness because it is mild, tender, compassionate, and humble--in a word, it makes you act in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

A Reflection on the Virtue of Vigilance: To incorporate the virtue of vigilance into a teachers teaching or parenting style are: Vigilance as the virtue that makes us diligent and painstaking in fulfilling all our tasks. Watching oneself, that is, over the thoughts of your mind, over the movements of your heart, over the use you make of your five senses, and over your entire person so as not to do anything except what is good. Also, only leave your classroom for a very serious necessity and always for as short a time as possible as a teacher's presence contributes much to making the students more attentive by fixing and arresting their imagination. Guard against a vigilance that is restless, suspicious, worried, accompanied by ill-founded conjectures, and so on. Apply vigilance peaceably, that is without agitation, trouble, constraint, or affection. The words in Acts 20:28 sum up this virtue.

A Reflection on the Virtue of Vigilance: Vigilance is the virtue that makes us diligent and painstaking in fulfilling all our tasks that encourages the following: Watch over yourself, that is, over the thoughts of your mind, over the movements of your heart, over the use you make of your five senses, and over your entire person so as not to do anything except what is good, only leave your classroom for a very serious necessity and always for as short a time as possible. In fact, your presence contributes much to making the students more attentive by fixing and arresting their imagination, guard against a vigilance that is restless, suspicious, worried, accompanied by ill-founded conjectures, and so on, apply vigilance peaceably, that is without agitation, trouble, constraint, or affection, it will then be all the more effective. A reflection on Acts 20:28 sums up this virtue "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God".

A Reflection on the Virtue of Piety: Piety is a virtue that helps you fulfill worthily your works



toward God. You should possess the virtue of piety in an eminent degree, that is, your piety should be both interior and sincere; otherwise you would only be a hypocrite; it should also be outward and exemplary because you should show externally the sentiments that fill your heart. Help young people understand well the Christian and moral virtues: faith, hope, charity, justice, goodness, honesty, wisdom, prudence, fortitude, temperance, modesty in talk and in all their conduct. To sum up this virtue is the following scripture: "Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way" (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

A Reflection on the Virtue of Generosity: Generosity is a virtue that helps you voluntarily sacrifice your personal interests to those of your neighbor, in the example of Saint Paul, who said that he was "not seeking [his] own advantage but that of many so that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:33). Devote yourself, not momentarily but for life, to the teaching career that is no doubt most honorable in itself but also extremely laborious and tedious in nature. Consider teaching as the sole object worthy of your labors, of your continual application, of your cares and study; and propose to yourself to make your students derive all the benefit from your efforts so that you can say to them with the Apostle, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for you" (2 Corinthians 12:15).

In line with professional practice in teaching and learning, every educator should have a professional obligation to formulate and articulate rationale for his or her instructional world (Rando & Merges, 1990, as cited by Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002). Methods of identifying educators teaching philosophies are not explicit in literature. However, related literature that points to educator's held beliefs about teaching have shown what characterizes highly effective or exemplary or noteworthy educators (Kane et. al., 2002).

Several studies (Anderson, 1993; Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002; Kariuki & Wambugu, 2007; Nieto, 2003; Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer Wioldmaire & Moore, 2007;

Stronge & Hindman, 2003; Zientech, 2007) have highlighted a plethora of characteristics that identify highly effective educators. Important to note is that although all these studies and scholars never committed themselves or were not aware what they were actually discussing were characteristics of a teaching philosophy, the concepts used, examples given and explanations given speak strongly on what a teaching philosophy is.

A review of literature on teaching beliefs and practices of university educators who were exemplary by Kane et. al. reported the following characteristics about the educators:

- ❖ Creating and maintaining student interest
- ❖ Caring for students
- ❖ Pitching at the student level
- ❖ Relevance to students' everyday experiences
- ❖ Starting from a practical base
- ❖ Teaching for learning
- ❖ Managing discomfort
- ❖ Interacting with students to ensure understanding and learning
- ❖ Fostering generic and lifelong learning skills

The process of hiring educators in developing countries like the USA at all levels and more critically at the tertiary level is a process that takes months and more often than not one calendar year is not too long. Whereas the general understanding is that there are so many "qualified" candidates, the process is aimed at coming up with educators who succeed [professionally] and thereby improve learners efficacy.

A persistent argument/assumption in this paper is that a teacher with a clear teaching philosophy has the potential to not only be effective and more importantly improve student achievement. An article by Stronge and Hindman (2003) on how to identify highly effective teachers came up with variables that identify them which are: caring, competent, humorous, knowledgeable,



enthusiastic, motivated, dedicated to teaching demanding and fair, and practices reflective practice. Other related variables were: analytical, dutiful, expert, diversity responsible, and respected.

As discussed earlier, teachers who make a difference especially with vulnerable learners and in vulnerable contexts are characterized by strongly held beliefs in love for their learners, that all learners can make it, democratic practice, their ability to shape the future among others (Nieto, 2003).

Kariuki and Wambugu in their book “God is looking for **FAT** teachers”, explained such teachers as Being F=Faithful, A=Available and T=Teachable. Their qualities of an ideal teacher strongly points to teaching from an informed philosophical teaching premise as the noted:

- ❖ An ideal teacher is someone who is taking education [teaching] as vocation...
- ❖ Has practical ideas and convictions and puts them into action regardless of consequences,
- ❖ Believes in God as a common father and lets his/her integrity spring forth from this belief...
- ❖ Takes an interest in each student and his/her social background so as to be able to
- ❖ Help each as much as he/she can....
- ❖ Possesses patriotic qualities and imparts the same to the learners....
- ❖ Appreciates and respects his/her students and colleagues
- ❖ Acknowledges his/her mistakes and failures and learns from them

In short, he/she aims at an all round development of the child and prepares the child for life (p. 1-2).

In conclusion, the author presents a summary of a “Philosophy of Education” class discussion on the characteristics of an educated person or what characterize an educated person. My

incorporation of this class discussion is on the understanding that an educator capable of inculcating values and virtues of effective teaching and learning in the classroom ought to be one working from a well-informed teaching philosophy as discussed in this paper. The virtues presented were:

- ❖ Speaks/communicates logically
- ❖ Applies sound moral judgment
- ❖ Be open minded
- ❖ Be free from bias, prejudice and stereotypes
- ❖ Be a role model [in most respect]
- ❖ Be well disciplined
- ❖ Offer good leadership
- ❖ Be understanding and caring
- ❖ Be humble
- ❖ Be well informed
- ❖ Respects self and others
- ❖ Be reflective and critical thinker
- ❖ Be social and interactive
- ❖ Be self-directed and motivated
- ❖ Be responsible
- ❖ Be a risk taker/initiative/innovative
- ❖ Connects theory to practice
- ❖ Practices sound and independent judgment
- ❖ Is teachable
- ❖ Learns from experience
- ❖ Is ever learning
- ❖ Is a person of integrity
- ❖ Is charismatic
- ❖ Strives for the common good
- ❖ Is generous
- ❖ A change agent
- ❖ Is democratic
- ❖ Cares for self, others and animals.

It is important to note that, the last characteristic is adopted from Noel Noddings (1996) in her extensive theorizing on “An ethics of care” to inform educators in the 21st C.

Recommendations for: Theory, Policy and Practice

A study by Johnson and Birkeland (2003) on how new educators pursue “a sense of success in



their practice” found out that whereas factors like career orientations, monetary aspects played key roles on how educators pursued their career goals, their experiences at the school sites played a more significant role on how well or how badly they pursued career goals. As the authors further contended, teachers [educators] who felt successful with students and whose schools were organized to support them in the teaching by providing collegial interaction, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources and school wide structures supporting student learning were more likely to stay in their schools and in teaching than those whose schools were not so organized.

As this study foregrounds, for educators to be able to articulate their teaching philosophies, and even want to stay in school sites the following are pertinent:

- ❖ Teacher education should orient pre-service teachers on the importance of well defined teaching philosophy
- ❖ Schools and administrative structures should offer a conducive environment and mentoring for this pursuance/articulation
- ❖ Administrators and hiring agencies to intensify the prerequisites of the hiring dossier to include a well articulated teaching philosophy
- ❖ Educators to rethink and continuously reflect on their teaching philosophies as the teaching/learning process is dynamic and so are the contexts.
- ❖ Research to investigate what informs educators in their practice in Africa

Finally, the following poem by Forest Witcraft is a special dedication to the past, present and future educators whose beliefs and practices about teaching has continued to make the world a better place to be in socially, economically, morally and politically.

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