

CHAPTER 1

INNOVATIONS IN PEDAGOGICS

1.1 AN INVESTIGATION OF AESTHETIC LEARNING AS A PART OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction: A teacher in a remote village in Kalangala, Uganda, was introduced to a new class, the fourth grade of the school. Prior to this, colleagues in the same primary school had registered the notoriety of a particular boy in that grade. On the first day, the teacher noticed and experienced a rowdy atmosphere and what came to his mind next was how to manage the class. He observed the students using swears, and angry words in the local dialect. He struggled to keep up with classroom management, behavioral challenges, and getting the pupils to speak using the standard language (English) which was also used for instruction. The teacher went home that day troubled. This continued for the next two weeks into the term. However, one day, during the class break, he peeped through the window and watched attentively the relations and interactions of his new pupils. He then developed the following underlying questions: *was he approaching the education of these pupils in a one-sided manner?* Could he have been addressing only the cognition/academic learning aspect of the pupils during his teaching, essentially ignoring the affective part? The teacher reflected on a teacher training seminar he had attended a few months ago largely based on Aesthetic education. At the time of the conference, he felt this approach was not of much use to him but the present challenges he was facing in this new classroom, got him thinking. This was the beginning of several discoveries that caused a paradigmatic shift in the teacher's approach to teaching.

Learning, as meant to be the objective of every educational institution, is far from being achieved when it is not effective without considering the multitude of components that impact the learner's humanity. Most academic institutions take up the responsibility of teaching primarily as designed by the curriculum, concentrating on learning, but seldom considering several other learner characteristics that could either enhance that learning or defeat it entirely. In addition, those who attempt to enhance learning, try to create a conducive atmosphere for learning. They also try to meet the basic needs of the learner in terms of physical essentials that matter such as comfortable accommodation, and essential scholastic materials. However, there are other variables that are key to enable learners to become more focused on their learning; that is what the aesthetic part of learning is set to achieve.

Theoretical Study: *Aesthetics* as a word originates from "*aisthetikosi*" (Greek); it means the ability to perceive through the senses (Pourhosseyeni, Sajjadi & Imani, 2014). In today's world, when we think of the aesthetics, what readily comes to mind is art and beauty. Little wonder, Greene (1995) states that aesthetics is the study of the arts; it explains the relationship between art and culture, and it is the eye of the perceiver, the sixth sense and imaginative aspect of art. However, several works of

literature have tried to define aesthetics but we relate to that which is specific to education. Weitz (1972, p. 2) defines aesthetic education "as an attempt to extend the affective, imaginative, formal and cognitive possibilities of the arts in all of their individual autonomy as well as their collective diversity to at least three types of children which indeed encompasses every child: the underprivileged; the undereducated and the under-perceptive". Aesthetics are usually seen as being related to beauty as in the beauty and interpretation of art but considering Weitz's description with regards to aesthetic education, they run far deeper than that. Aesthetics are vital in the whole development of the human and having academics neglect this area in learning could result in serious consequences. Green (1995) helps us understand that there is a relationship between aesthetics and how learners learn. A learner's interrelationship of art, for example, is through the senses and the influence of culture on him or her.

There are several specific types of curricular approaches that incorporate some of Green's ideas. For example, Drama Based teaching and learning work on the aesthetic experiences of a learner that informs their intellect and "affect". This is evident in the process of creating, interpreting, and juxtaposing between symbols and meaning-making while utilizing drama as a component of the curriculum (Kathryn & Bridget, 2018). The empirical research by Anttila (2018) demonstrates a connection between musical activities and linguistic and mathematical skills balancing abilities as self-confidence, social and cognitive skills. Webster & Wolfe (2013, p. 23) note that what makes a learning experience is not just the teacher, the learner and the availability of material to be learnt, but also "involves the embodied presence of the student, her activity of meaning-making and her desires". Without these, the students' learning experiences are not complete. A teacher can create an excellent lesson, but until the learner is showing interest (desire) and is striving to understand or give meaning to what is being taught, true learning cannot take place. This process of learning is the aesthetic experience. For this experience to be realized thinking becomes essential (Dewey, 1985) and we have to understand that thinking is more of an art rather than a science. According to Webster & Wolfe (2013), thinking is the mind brooding on a subject matter trying to figure out through aesthetic and affective means. Meanwhile, Dewey (1934) further explores the role of the aesthetic experience, incorporating objects and activities into the lessons especially through the arts (e.g. drama, music, photography etc). This becomes the stimulant of that experience. Garrison (2010) noted that Dewey sees inquiry, a critical part of the learning experience, to be a creative, artistic activity.

Importance of teachers creating aesthetic experiences: It has been pointed out by Schulman & Schulman (2004, p. 2) that in the quest to establish a framework at which teachers can attain steady development, the teacher is theorized as a "member of a professional community who is ready, willing and able to teach and to learn from his or her teaching experiences". The authors suggest that the professional development of teachers is self-driven. In other words, to be a part of a professional educational community, teachers' readiness is driven by a vision which is sustained by a willingness to explore from two paradigms which include teaching and

reflection on their teaching. We will describe how aesthetic learning is used in the furtherance of teacher professional development, including Schulman's, on teaching and reflection. More than anything, it is important for every teacher to guide learners to have aesthetic experiences incorporated into their lessons. This is also true in teacher professional development experiences as well as in the everyday experiences of his/her students. Learning tends to be boring and monotonous without these experiences. Dewey (2008) suggests that teachers should open the door to more aesthetic experiences for their students, via providing more open-ended problems and learning experiences that encourage learners to engage in the process of thinking and reflection rather instead of learning set information. This as an understanding requires more than just recognition of facts (Dewey, 1989, p. 24). Incorporated into this approach is the need for learners to be open to other ways of arriving at learning outcomes. This may mean that learners will need to appreciate the essential parts of every lesson. He specifically addressed the aesthetic component of learning by noting that reasoning in the absence of imagination is devoid of truth as imagination is essential in expanding learners understanding.

Webster & Wolfe (2013, p. 24) further expand the role of imagination, noting that imagination as a cognitive function encouraged through aesthetic means should be part of teacher professional development. They explain that learning as a journey is geared towards meaning-making so teachers must guide learners to various ways of knowing and describe how some professionals give their students this aesthetic experience in the classroom. For example, a design technology teacher introduced screen printing to his Year 9 students, but during the class, he understood that some students' interests were in doing multiple prints, other students were in color printing, etc. Preferred additions to the basic assignment were also quite varied. By listening to the students, he allowed their voices to be heard in reaching the same learning outcomes.

Without aesthetics, a teacher walks into the classroom to meet pupils and then he or she is focused on the learner's intellect because that is what the curriculum that guides him or her addresses. Attention is not paid to the "affect" part of the pupil. However, through aesthetics, there is a paradigm shift that takes place in the teacher's mind. The teacher moves beyond the subject to be taught and does an investigation on how societal culture, school culture, and peer group culture affect the pupils learning in and out of the classroom. To this, Dawson & Lee (2018) explains that learners develop language and grow through dialogue with their teachers, peers and environment.

Aesthetics investigation by a teacher in Uganda: From our introduction, we are introduced to the experiences of a teacher in a rural area of southern Uganda. As noted earlier, the teacher identified one particular student as having more behavioral issues than others and serving as a ringleader, so to speak, to other students, generally diminishing the overall behavior and learning of the entire classroom. After noticing this, the teacher's curiosity made him pay a visit to the pupil's home and that alone helped to open some doors to what he needed to understand in order to gain the

attention of the pupil. It was here that he learned that his student was part of the Karamojong cultural group. There are several cultural groups in Uganda, one of which is the Karamojong. The Karamojong are a cultural group of Ugandans living mainly in northern Uganda and have relied on cattle rearing and agriculture for their livelihood (Knighton, 2005). Karamojong were essentially nomadic pastoralists (ranchers). Cattle rearing and hunting were typical of their people. However, as the impact of famine and devastating territorial militarism came to play in their lives, they had to migrate from the arid regions of Uganda to areas vibrant with vegetation and also towards the cities (The Peace for Paul Foundation, n.d).

The culture of the Karamojong has historically strongly supported heroism and nomadic values, although their nomadic existence has been turning more towards agricultural lifestyles. The oral tradition of passing on knowledge still remains strong, and the importance of literacy has not traditionally been valued (Knighton, 2006). In addition to not have a strong cultural history supporting formal education, it is difficult for many of the Karamojong to financially be able to afford the assorted costs that accompany a child's education, i.e. books, school supplies, uniforms, etc. The few females who do attend public schools are often encouraged to drop and marry young. While primary education is free in Uganda, the Karamoja region continues to have the lowest attendance rate as compared to other areas in Uganda (Lirrii, 2016). Often, children are instead encouraged to participate in activities related to maintaining their family livelihood (The Peace for Paul Foundation, n.d). Considering this historically oral, nomadic ethnic group's relationship with public education, it can be seen how important it is to consider the overall backgrounds of each student in a classroom, for backgrounds and support from family and culture, can play a role in pupil performance.

Interventions through the use of aesthetic learning: The art of teaching and learning are interpreted as aesthetic being experienced by either the teacher or the learner as it comprises of imagination, feeling, intuition, reflection, will and association (Amini, 2005). The teacher described at the beginning of this article understands that some of his pupils are from cultural groups that have not traditionally valued literacy and education. Moreover, his students may be emotionally and psychologically stressed or affected by the recent changes in their lives, i.e. moving to a different area of Uganda, not following the same path as their parents (i.e. acquiring a formal education), etc. How is the teacher going to put these factors into consideration during class time? He decides to adopt aesthetics into his teaching armed with his background research on his pupils. He recognizes that having an aesthetic understanding of the process of teaching and learning and the nature of education could pave way for societal sustainable development (Girod, Rau, & Schepige, 2003; Hobbs, 2012; Chou, Cheng & Cheng, 2016; Medina, 2012; Kokkos, 2011).

The teacher develops insights into the reasons for inappropriate behavioral challenges of his pupils and so introduces lessons in social studies and during class administration that stress such kind of values that can help to manage such behavioral tendencies. These include forgiveness, love, giving and sharing, patience and collaboration. He also understands that there are different influences that could

affect them; those of their parents and cultural group, those of their peers, and the school itself. He decides to organize a campaign with the support of the head teacher to reduce the cases of stigmatization and bullying that had occurred in part due to a lack of understanding and support to the culture and practices of some cultural groups within the school. This gradually impacted the behavior of all students in a positive manner.

Other factors that helped improve the behavior and overall school climate were also instituted. The teacher teamed up together with other teachers to keep track of the pupil's whereabouts during school hours and enforced discipline within the school premises. Although female genital mutilation has been outlawed in Uganda for nine years, it is still being practiced (Selby, 2019). Teachers in this school environment played the role of counsellors, providing emotional support to female children who were traumatized as a result of being genitally mutilated. They encouraged their educational studies, reminding them of how this could have a significant impact on their future lives. All students were being encouraged to develop a stronger ethos of responsibility. Many of these actions were infused into the curriculum via teaching done with artistic mediums, like drama, music, dances and pictorials. Students learned to reflect on their learning through group work and discussions as well as debates. Through these types of lessons, better student-teacher relationships developed. Hence, the teacher was also able to provide career guidance to those with the inclination for an area of discipline. He was able to serve as a role model, motivating other teachers in the school to do the same.

Another area in which the teacher was able to assist students, such as the Karamojong student who did not have the same level of support and performance skills as his peers, was by providing differentially adapted lessons - remedial lessons to help those struggling students in the areas most needed. He sought out more information on students with exceptionalities, such as a history of trauma and abuse, learning disabilities autism, etc. He then shared what he learned with the parents and got appropriate referrals. By so doing these parents began to feel the sense of a larger community and then responded positively in encouraging their children to learn.

Discussion of teacher aesthetic interventions: It is observed that if the teacher were to continue with the approach he was using during the first few weeks of the class, he may not have achieved many positive results in his classroom. This is the first realization. Through enquiry, the teacher discovered the reasons for the behavioral challenges and emotional imbalances of the pupils. He took time to study the background of his pupils to find out that apart from school culture, what other groups had a great influence on their learning, and how to accommodate for this impact. He made an enquiry about their parents' attitudes towards education and also their peer groups and understood what adaptations he needs to make to his pedagogy and behavioral management style to have an effective classroom that met all his students' needs.

This teacher's prior training experience had prepared him to deal with the new challenging classroom, and as a result, we see that the teacher took a personally motivated step and approach towards dealing with the behavioral challenges of his

pupils. Motivated by his drive to improve the difficult situation, the teacher teamed up with the school authorities and proffered solutions to address the problems from the perspective of the school environment. His investigations opened up the door for societal change, beginning from the school environment and then moving towards community transformation.

His approach was with the use of aesthetics. He put himself in the shoes of his students and discovered what they must be going through mentally and emotionally. He decided to tackle the matter with aesthetic learning methods which focused both on intellect and "affect" part of the learner. His lessons took a new dimension as aesthetics was incorporated. Each step with the students utilized drama based pedagogy, making learners work as an ensemble. By using storytelling or narrative modes, pupils had to reflect on each stage of the lesson all the way to the end of the lesson, making them active, engaged learners and who were developing questioning skills that supported the taking charge of their own learning. Moreover, the teacher was able to strike a balance in an area of weakness in the educational system. By teaching only in local languages from grades and then only in English from grades four and beyond, some students were truly struggling when they reached grades four and onwards. The teacher was able to collaborate with the school, and a remedial class for the English language learning was opened; this supported the pupils who were struggling with lessons in English regardless of the reasons.

Conclusion: Professional Development as described by Schulman is motivated by a teacher's willingness and readiness to teach and reflect on his or her teaching. Applying aesthetic teaching methods just takes the teacher a step further in his self-driven professional development. One step at a time a teacher's reflection on his/her teaching can bring about several discoveries and can bring true change to an educational institution, and hopefully, the surrounding societal culture.

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