Philosophy Of Education: Definition And Theoretical Issues

As a simple definition, the philosophy of education is a philosophy about education and it's aims (Hamm, 1989). While Cahn (2009) and Peters (2010) argue that the philosophy of education is merely the study of historical philosophers and the critical examination of their ideas of the aims of education, Oancea and Bridges (2009) and Allen and Goddard (2017) both support the importance of understanding historical philosophies of education but argue that this understanding should be used to provide insight into contemporary philosophies. Fung (2005) claims that through their training, teachers should be exposed to these historical theories of teaching and learning and along with their practical experience of teaching in the classroom and individual values student teachers are encouraged to form their own personal philosophies of education.

Philosophy of education is the examination of the purpose of education, therefor a teacher's personal philosophy of education studies what they aim to achieve through their teaching (Nodding, 2018). It essential that teachers identify their philosophy for teaching and learning and their educational beliefs to guide them and provide direction throughout their career (Bailey, 2013; Aggarwal, 2010; Moore, 2010; Curran, 2006; Peters, 1973). Brookfield (1990) stated a personal philosophy is 'a clear picture of why you are doing what you are doing that you can call up at points of crisis—is crucial to your personality sanity and morale" (p. 16). Biesta (2015) argues your personal philosophy details what you aspire to achieve and provides a criteria for you to reflect and evaluate your effectiveness.

A teacher's philosophy of education should be rooted in their own personal experiences, values and beliefs while also drawing upon previous pioneers of educational philosophy and pedagogies (Winch, 2012; Brookfield, 2017). Reflecting on the influences that have shaped my own philosophy of teaching and learning I have identified that my own special educational needs of having dyslexia and ADHD has formed my central philosophical importance of providing inclusive education. Additionally, my aim for an inclusive classroom has been informed by my political views and moral beliefs.

I believe the purpose of education is to develop children as individuals that can function as good citizens and participate positively in society; one of the aims of education stated by Brighouse (2006). Brighouse (2006) and Biesta (2015) compare society to the classroom and the school community. Early philosophers such as Bertrand Russell (Russel, 1932), George Counts (Counts, 1932), Theodore Brameld (Brameld, 1965), and Paulo Friere (Friere, 1970) have been recognised as those whom introduced early Reconstructivism philosophies of education (Zacko-Smith, 2012). However, Dewey has been described as the pioneer of modern Social Reconstructivism, although he was also critical in the development of progressivism and pragmatism and therefor the key concepts and ideas of both these theories, especially pragmatism, are rooted in the key themes of Social Reconstructivism (Tan, 2006) .

Tan (2006) argues the difference between pragmatism and Reconstructivism is that while pragmatic teaching aims to develop and prepare children to function in society, reconstructivist educational goals are to empower children to change the society they will live in. Social Reconstruction describes the idea that educations' purpose is to develop and shape society for

the benefit of all (Winch and Gingell, 2008; McGregor, 2019) and to perceive children as future vehicles for change (Bourne, Crossfield & Nicholas, 2017). Gutek (2014) stated Dewey maintained a strong belief that education has a responsibility to make the world a better place to live in. Similarly, Schiro (2012) claims Dewey highlighted education's role in developing social and moral growth.

A reconstructivist education is one that examines controversial issues and encourages children to be part of change (Ornstein and Levine, 2003). If a society relies on citizens engaging in debates with people who have oppositional opinions and respecting differences then these are skills that need to be taught in schools otherwise children will be ill-equipped to do this (Barton and McCully, 2007).

There is an awareness that educators must be taught social issues in the classroom, however, this means that they inevitably will come across controversial issues (Clarke, 2005).

There is no single definition of a controversial teaching issue and controversial issues can change based on the setting or through the ages (Yacek 2018). Porter (1998) defines a controversial issue as one with different opinions and with no universally accepted stance, while Kerr and Huddleston (2015) describe such issues as ones that evoke strong feelings and spilt communities. The Council of Europe (2015) combined these definitions and claimed that a controversial issue is an issue “which arouse strong feelings and divide opinion in communities and society” (p.9). Importantly, Oxfam’s (2006) definition included that controversial issues can challenge people values and beliefs.

Cowen and Maitles (2012) acknowledge the debate to whether children should be exposed to such issues at a young age such as a primary school-aged child. However, Cowen and Maitles (2012) explain how children are already being exposed to these issues through the media and have a curiosity to learn more about the world around them and the social issues that effect their society even at a young age. This issue is becoming increasingly important as children are able to access the internet at an increasingly younger age and ease, most of which is unreliable, and if these issues are not addressed in the class will be there only form of information on such topics (Oxfam, 2006; Scarratt and Davison, 2012; Council of Europe, 2015). Hess (2018) argues that avoiding or ignoring controversial issues is a damaging option and can potentially send a misguided message about what is important to learn and teach.

A recent controversial issue in education has been in the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) education as part of teaching equality and/or relationship education. In 2016 Moffat released a book entitled ‘No Outsider’ and the book contained lesson plans that included the teaching of LGBT topics (Moffat 2016). The books’ aims is to celebrate differences and acknowledge that the teaching of equality needs to include an LBGT inclusive curriculum. The Equality Act (2010) protects people from being discriminated against due to their sexual orientation, race, religion and gender reassignment in society and therefore schools are required to ensure the same people are protected against discrimination as well to promote knowledge understanding and respect. If by law LGBT people to protected against discrimination, then children need to be taught these lessons in school otherwise how will they be able to do this is society? To exclude or ignore the presence of LGBT communities is to ignore children’s identities, families and to provide a disservice to their education. Children are able to talk openly and thoughtfully about LGBT people and the issues surrounding the topic (Hackman 2002; Barozzi and Ojeda 2014). Carlie (2019) acknowledges the concern that

children are too young to be discussing topic such as LGBT and sexuality, however, argues that these topics can be presented at an age-appropriate level, and credits resources such a children's literature. Gegenfurtner and Gebhardt (2017) cites staggering reports of LGBT school children being more likely to be victims of bullying, physical abuse, emotional abuse, school absences due to fears of assault and even contemplating suicide. Yet there are still parents who disprove of the inclusion of LGBT education in school. In 2017-2018 news spread across the media of parents protesting outside of a school that included a book called 'and tango makes three' based on a real-life event the book tells a story of two male penguins who raise a child. Protests were held outside of the school, which resulted in 22 teachers reporting stress-related issues, by parents who complained the book promoted an LBGT lifestyle. DePalma 2016 argues that books similar to this break heterosexual normativity, the idea that it is only normal to be heterosexual is shown through the lack of acknowledgment for the LGBT community n education though the years. Finally, in 2019-2020 government included LGBT education through relationship education in primary schools ensuring all member of society we reflected in education. However, they have held the right for parents to remove their child from such education, detailed vague guidance of school assess themselves weather these view reflect there community and provided insuffiecent support for teacher to approach and deliver such challenging lessons.

I believe through upholding values that we as teachers are instructed to value and such reflect in our practice believe that everyone should be respected and free from discrimination including people who have different sexual orientations, believe in different religions, are a different race and have disabilities. Through teaching controversial topics and issues children learn a better understanding and respect for these issues. However, reflecting on my own practice I have felt anxious and ill-prepared for teaching topics such as the slave trade in history due to worries of questions about race and discrimination. In times like these where different races, genders and sexual ordinations are not given the same equal rights as other it is more important than ever to teach children about this issue so they are best inform for and have the ability to change the future society.

Walbert (2014) teaching controversial issues in the classroom leads to children becoming more active citizens who uphold democratic values and interests.

Beista (2015) states that education can serve more than one aim or view of education. An essentialist philosophy of education is the idea that education serves the purpose to teach children the a set of common basic skills and knowledge children will need to prepare them for future society (Cohen, 1999; Schunk, 2014; Gerstein, 2014). Blanford (2011) and Hunt (2010) stated essentialism requires children to learn essential knowledge in subject such as Math, English and Science. This philosophy seen as a traditional view of education (Hunt, Carper, Lasley, & Raisch, 2010) facilitating direct teaching and children are passive learners (Pogue, 2009). While Null (2007) argue essentialism and progressivism (therefor pragmatism and social reconstructivism) are conflicting philosophies of education I believe that while my main philosophy of education is centred in progressive theories I also believe children do need to acquire basic knowledge in subjects such as maths and English. However, such rigorous testing, extensive curriculum and main focus on performance has taken away the aim of education from learning to the ability to recall information (Adams, 2006; Sarid, 2018)