

Sartre's Ontology and its implications on Education in Kenya: Critical Reflections on Bhadra's Phenomenology and Existentialism

(Bhadras, 1990, pp.346-393)

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ABSTRACT

Jean Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, was a prolific author of over 50 literary works. Some of his Philosophical essays include; *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (1936), *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939), *The Imaginary* (1940), *Being and Nothingness* (1943), *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946), *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (1957), *Search for a Method* (1957), *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960, 1985), *Notebooks for Ethics* (1983) and *Truth and Existence* (1989). Sartre is considered to be the first Philosopher to use the term existentialism as a philosophical system. Existentialism in education is a teaching and learning philosophy that focuses on the student's freedom and agency to choose their future (Ginny, 2012). Sartre first used it to describe his life and that of the postwar literary and philosophical output of his associates. Sartre argued for the different themes across his literary works, yet the bottom line of his thought was not only based on his 'lived-experiences' but also his view of reality, better considered as Sartre's ontology. This paper therefore discussed Sartre's ontology and its implication to educational practices and policies in Kenya.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Jean Paul Sartre's prolific ideas and concepts on existentialism are undoubtedly reputable and consequently worthy reflecting and applying in education. As an existentialist, Sartre's principles are central in the interpretation of the human person and his environment. The place of the individual person in his social environment is perhaps a phenomenon that Sartre can best elucidate from an existential perspective.

However, discourses around the human society tend to forget a critical assessment of the role of the human person in the overall judgment of the society. Appeal to human component in the socio-educational analysis tends to begin from the universality of social realities in such a way that human experiences are deduced from the abstractions of social realities. It is in this regard that this paper sought to explore the ontology of the individual human person by appealing to Educational theory and practice.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To investigate the centrality Sartre's concept of Nothingness and Bad Faith in Pedagogy and education.
2. To establish the Implications of Sartre's ontology of being on Educational aims and practice.
3. To interrogate Sartre's concept of Freedom and its implication to education in Kenya.

SARTRE'S ONTOLOGY

Any typical metaphysical discourse hinges itself on the philosophy of being (ontology) which provides the

conceptual framework for understanding the universe (cosmology), the nature of God (theodicy), and the human person (psychology) Ginny (2012). Sartre's exposition on ontology as presented by Bhadra (1990), generally ties his ontology to rational discourse on the nature of man. Five ontological elements and their inferred bearing on Education were outlined as presented below:

The centrality of Sartre's concept of Nothingness and Bad Faith in Pedagogy and education

Nothingness as pedagogical disposition

According to Sartre, man is by nature an incomplete being whose existence is fragmented. This fragmentation is a precipice of uncertainty about what man is. As such, the most logical place in an attempt to understand the nature of man is to question what he really is, at any given point. However, to question implies that something is not known and this not knowing something Sartre refers to it as the phenomenon of negation and negativity (Bhadra, 1990, p.346). Foundation of negation is nothingness and nothingness is none being.

He further points out three types of none being, namely: the Question, the Negative and the Destruction (p. 347). As to the source of nothingness and its aim, Sartre identified it in each and every being and argued that it serves the purpose of comprehending negativities. The principle of Nothingness implies that human existence became basically meaningless. He states, "We are thrown into the world without meaning" (Sartre, 1943) and as such a human being is the maker of all meanings he finds in the world. Bearing in the absolute unknowability of man and his operations, nothingness is the blank slate upon which educational experiences are casted. The aim of education is thus to find meaning, to join knowledge and skill fragments that absent at the starting point of educative experiences. Education thus begins by posing questions, which is a disposition of unknowing that is open to further learning.

Bad Faith and Educational Practices

The principle of Bad Faith is built up of the seamless continuum between Phenomenological experiences which he calls facticity and the fecundity of possibility which terms as transcendence (Bhadra, p. 354). Facticity implies descriptive phenomenological occurrences while transcendence is the leeway for betterment. He delineates bad faith from Lies by positing tripartite criteria for a lie. A lie entails the following; Belief that something is true, expressing to another the opposite of what is believed, the other must believe in what is expressed. Bad faith is thus a situation in which facticity and transcendence are kept apart, different from a lie. The concept of bad faith is commensurable with Aristotle's principle and act, in which potency implies the capability to actuate an existential shift towards improved being without necessarily implying finality (Bhadra, 1990). Educative experiences are often assessed based on the goals and objectives that are set beforehand. A learner might for example be considered as an underperformer because he or she does not meet expectations. The assessment produces judgments which are communicated to the learner. The interpretation of the learner can be based on good faith or bad faith, where bad faith indicates the learner's attitude is that of despair and non-belief in the transcendence of better performance. Good faith on the other hand engenders optimism which then leads to more motivation and action to improve.

Implications of Sartre's ontology of being on Educational aims

Being-for-itself (translated from French *l'être pour soi*) means that what a being is, is not one with what he is, or what he manifests by order of facticity. It further implies that what a being is, is subject to its becoming, realizing itself towards some level of consciousness, and this is only possible to the human person as opposed to the exteriority of the wider cosmos delineated from its anthropocentric aspects. Sartre argued that, the Human Being is being for itself, his being is not one with what he is his being a project to be realized; the 'I' involves incommunicability of consciousness and its un-givenness. This concept is critical in understanding the nature of the learner as a being at the center of any educational experience.

The aim of Education is to facilitate the learner to find his bearing in himself/herself. Education based on Sartre's ontology aims to help a learner to go back into his immanent powers and to locate his authentic being from within. Instructing such a learner then takes into account a subjected-oriented anthropology of education and learner centered strategies.

Knowledge of the self as an autonomous individual as well as the skills to work through problems and conflict that come in confronting the world (facticity) and people (others). Education is to help the human being come to terms with his individual project, accept his freedom and facticity, and emerge as the unique human being that he is [Barstow, p. 180]. To learn authenticity and learn to live authentically (see Theory of Human Nature). To prepare the student to create meaning (for self and facticity) and be able to act on and direct meaning toward a goal. [Being and Nothingness]. To help students take responsibility for their own life, their own decisions, and help them understand their role and responsibility vis-a-vis others (as a "being- for-others").

Being in itself and its implication in conceptualizing extrinsic aim of education: Being-in-itself (Translated from –L'etre en soi) is the contrary on Being for itself, and communicates the external orientation of being. It gears itself towards the material object, in which there is no distance of nothingness (Bhadra, p.358). In this context Existents have being independent of consciousness and that appear before consciousness which means they don't have capacity to move towards immense but acquire exteriority. It is characterized Being as it is, being is in itself which culminates into being is what it is. This means that education has a component that is objective and given. Given in such a sense that it cannot be transcendent and as such its facticity remains the level that its perceived. This conceptualization forms an ontology of educational aims that seek to standardize experiences.

Sartre's Concept of Freedom and its implication on education

The first premise of Sartre's concept of freedom is consciousness. Consciousness for him is self-knowledge of a *being-for-itself*. Its nature is to go beyond itself, to be what it is not and to be what it is. It is by this virtue that Consciousness is free and can be temporalized (P.369). The fluidity of consciousness makes it a free aspect of humanity, operating at all levels from decision-making to learning. Sartre seems to suggest that schools should be liberal, a free place where learners should be free to choose whatever they want, whenever they want. They have to make choices appropriate to them and not being lumped into a basket of collectiveness individuality. Each learner is a *Pour soi*, a being for itself. This also advocates for diversity and not uniformity. Democratic consciousness engenders disagreement (conflict and resistance) as inherent in human existence and the world as the existence of others creates natural possibility that one will limit the freedom of the other. Since one can only have control over oneself (autonomy) conflict is an ongoing reality. We reach consensus by taking responsibility to construct our individual lives and values in a way that is responsible to the reality of the existence of others, and we decide/act as we would want others to as they take responsibility for my existence.

Central to democratic consciousness is educational dialogue. An educational approach based on dialogue is an approach that places appropriate weight on both the teacher and student's roles. The relation in education is one of pure dialogue. The dialogue can only come to the force if the student trusts the educator, if the student feels accepted otherwise any attempt to educate will lead to rebellion and lack of interest. A democratic Society is the convergence of external facticity (the world as it is) and each individual confronting both their own internal facticity (their personal "world" history) as well as the desires of others. Society is where each individual learns to emerge as autonomous as a "being-for-others" together with others with goal to attain personal freedom vis-a-vis the others. [Being and Nothingness]. Society is the sum of social relations between individuals, reflected by the groups and institutions that comprise society. Society and social conditions provide a context for, they influence our personal choices.

Implications of Sartre's existentialism to Educational theory and practice in Kenya

Existentialism as a whole, advocates for an education that helps the individual living an existential life. It aims at the development of authenticity, self-realization, choice-making power, responsibility, ability to face tragic situations and uniqueness in the child. In addition, it also develops creative abilities, spiritually, individual potential, integrity, critical attitude, subjectivity and self-actualization.

Sartre's existentialism favors diverse curricula suiting the needs, abilities and aptitudes of the individual. It serves both immediate as well the ultimate needs of the learner. Humanities and arts acquire a central place in the curriculum. Arts and humanities courses, especially in the secondary school curriculum can provide challenging opportunities for the introduction of existentialist concepts.

Teaching of sciences, vocational education and moral education and religious education are permissible. Existentialism leads to self-reliance and self-directedness which is an important aspect of new methodologies of learning. Schools therefore exist to assist children in knowing themselves and their place in society. The task of the teacher is to awaken in students' self-awareness and help them to be 'original' and 'authentic'. These are the tenets of a Competency Based Curriculum as envisioned in the new education system in Kenya.

Sartre thus advocates that a teacher must satisfy students' hunger for education with auspicious teaching and must know how to stimulate the hunger. This implies that a teacher should have additional quality of motivating students. Both teachers and students treated as individuals. Existentialism therefore explores how man can live existentially and how existential education develops the skills required for existential life. Existential education aims to develop creative abilities in children. Creativity is an important aspect not only for the individual but also for the society. Since existentialism offers opportunity for individual experiences that may involve even those initiatives that we are not taken by anyone before, such experiences bring out the creative spark inherent in an individual. His creative potential is recognized that can take society to new dimensions to reform.

Sartre's existentialism holds that man is responsible for his deeds. Thus, there is accountability towards the world, but it is a pity that existentialists have limited or narrowed man's sense of accountability only to this world. Man's nature is such that he wants continuation of life even after death.

CONCLUSION

Sartre's ontology is by all means the essence of existential discourse. It gives pre-eminence and priority to the existential dictum of existence over essence, by clearly pointing out on the constructive and individuated nature of human activity. This in turn forms the basis of more authentic and liberal education. Sartre's existentialism therefore, develops in children authenticity, responsibility, spirituality, love, a sense of being oneself, self-awareness, self-knowledge, subjectivity, critical attitude individualism and uniqueness. It enables learners to face tragic life situations like anxiety, alienation, despair and frustration which help them to resist from substance abuse and falling into depression. All these traits, qualities or abilities developed by existential education bestows the individual, the potential to progress. This thus saves human existence and leads humans to progress.

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