

Knowledge is a paramount virtue: A critical defense of the nobility of teaching profession

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Abstract: Over the ages, humanity has been classist and getting divided more than united over issues of life and existential living. Hargreaves argues that kinds of life jobs have also become one of the classist stoop to divide people according to their employments to the effect that other jobs have been argued to be not equal with others and some people suffer less respect than others. It requires a critical thinking that the profession that foundationally and literally serves as the basis of all professions is now argued to be not a profession but somehow something like a mere calling and a mission. It is on that backdrop that I hereby endeavor to use analytical theory to analyze and critique views that came forth to argue different perspectives concerning the practice or the career of teaching. This writing is to set forth that since teaching has the requirements of a skilled labor and a profession; it makes more sense than not to consider it a fully-fledged profession that requires a paramount status like other professions. It is in fact a noble profession because it even produces all these other known professions. Since this paper defends the importance of teaching as a profession I set forth to settle some incoherent questions that critics of education offer to downgrade teaching as a profession. With analytic theory I will be able to peruse and critically analyze the available literature, and without any bias or stereotype, I will be able to offer my defensible views as amicable as possible. Since the purpose of this study is to analyze the available literature and investigate the understanding of scholars with regards to this concept of professionalism and profession, analytic theoretical framework will be used. My basic argument is that it is not the case that teaching should be a profession, but that it is in fact a fully-fledged profession that should be recognized as such by all other professionals. With my stated purpose and aim of this study it becomes quite clear that its importance lies in defending teaching as a noble profession that deserves an equal honor and respect at a similar level with other established professions. At the end, this study is aimed at clarifying the mysteries and misconceptions that tend to discourage some people who want to start a career in education/ teaching as an honorable profession.

Keywords: Teaching, Profession, Classism, Professionalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among kinds of jobs that exist in the world today and workers that occupy positions in those jobs there has been a growing attitude of class struggle. Together with class struggle there came about a classification of jobs. There are jobs that come with honor to the highest level, jobs that come with honor to the middle level, and jobs that come with no honor at all. This kind of classification is commonly justified by the level of training and qualifications that one needs to get that kind of a job. For different jobs, there are varying degrees of training and qualifications that are needed as prerequisite requirements that one must have to be employable in that field. Totalprofessions.com (2019) argues that there is no rationality in employing someone hoping that she will deliver accordingly when there is no evidence of that person having undergone some formal training. It sounds like a fair and rational argument given that in all things that someone gets employed to do there must be some sort of assurance that the candidate is the right choice for that particular position. Mirandon (2015) traces back to the philosophy of Plato, he thereby argues that not all jobs can be done and be rated equal or not everyone can do the jobs of equal standard. That serves as a *raison-detre* for that some people go for the formal

tertiary education while some people do not even strive until passing matric. This can highly be grasped when referring to Plato's philosophy because it comes from Plato's political philosophy that not all people are gifted equally or even similarly (Taylor, 2013; Mirandola, 2015). Given that even the body stature that humans have are differently built, it becomes very clear that people's capabilities and abilities have to differ. This paper is set forth to argue against the unfairness of underrating teaching as a profession. Undermining teaching profession and teachers, saying that they are not professionals while they are the actual producers of all other professionals seems to be not only unfair but also insensitive.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is situated within the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy is characterized by an emphasis on clarity and argument, often achieved through logical and linguistic analysis (McGinn, 2002). Gottlob Frege (1906) was considered as the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasizes on clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting the thoughts. Within this framework Bertrand Russell argued for logicism and logical atomism (Soames, 2003). Logicism and logical atomism refers to the practice of breaking the argument into basic propositions in order to understand its coherence as a whole (Soames, 2003). Similarly, Barry Hallen and John O Sodipo (1997) argue for the analytical breakdown of issues to a simpler and logical thoughts through the use of logic in a simple ordinary language. Philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding of language and all necessary truths are a priori, analytic and true in virtue if meaning of words depend upon how the world in fact is (Soames, 2003). Analytic approach helps in producing philosophy that is not ideologically motivated, but thought that is analytic and reflective (Hallen, 2005). Inspired by Wittgenstein (1937), Rudolf Carnap (1961) sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism as a development to this tradition. Logical positivism claims that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is logical clarification of thoughts (Soames, 2003). Carnap and other scholars contributed to this tradition by rejecting the dogmas of their predecessors of constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems. They argue that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the "quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misleading intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy" (Glock, 2008: 44).

The use of analytic framework in this research work helps in acquiring a deeper understanding of the research problem before putting my own views. Since it is the framework which guides me in my methodology it also helps to critically apply analysis that is not bias in anyway, but pure as it is. With this framework, I have been able to be reflective and at the same time be within guards of rationality while being critical of my thoughts. With the guide of logical positivism, I have been able to deal with dogmas and ideological speculations around the issue of teaching profession while operating as a neutral being in the battle between parties against and parties for fair judgement of occupations. As Soames (2003) argued that logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts, this has helped me to simplify my thoughts. In this paper, I have used the ordinary language in producing my critical thoughts while at the same time analyzing the common thoughts that currently exist in the world. Analytic framework is adequately relevant when dealing with the sensitive issues like this one of professionalism because many people pass brutal judgements when talking about other professions. The depth of these harsh judgements risks the production of discouraged teachers in schools and discouraged students who want to become professional teachers.

3. ANALYSIS

On his concept of justice Plato argues that the society will be just only if people participate according to their natural abilities (Walton, 2015). He then divides the society into three different kinds of people which are; (i) Philosopher kings, (ii) Auxiliaries, and (iii) Guardians (Sachs, 2007). Philosopher kings are those who are naturally endowed with superior intelligence and reason to serve at a higher rank of the society. They would be in the seat of professors, presidents, and other senior positions of the state (Aeterna press, 2015). Then by auxiliaries Plato referred to those who are naturally gifted with physical prowess and strength to serve the community in at a medium level of army and defense services (Sachs, 2007). Furthermore, by the concept of guardians which in some writings are referred to as men of appetite, Plato referred to the family men, those who are naturally endowed with strength to serve the community at a level of heading families, producing children, and doing other lower class services in the society (Sachs, 2007; Barker, 2012). However, in total this argument is tantamount to saying that a just and fair society is that kind of a society where life and cooperation is happening according to these categorizations with regards to its people. By inverse, if the society puts everyone in position simply because it wants to, and can do so, it will lack justice and heading towards its destruction. I think that this kind of thought has gone far more serious in different societies as has been used even by those who have some noticeable

intentions to despise or downgrade others. I write this paper with a focus on the claims by some professionals who have classified jobs to the level of even saying that being an educator or a teacher is not a profession, but rather it should be regarded as a general employment as other kinds of occupations.

Nobility can be defined as something that is good or beneficial and has a sense of honor due to the dignity that it gives to the person/s responsible for it (Rayan, 2019; Parsons, 2020). Ingersoll and Collins (2018) add by arguing that nobility is something that in itself has value such that its service to the community and humanity as a whole cannot be ignored. By virtue of its value as an act of human beings it then grants a supreme quality to the human agents that make it be, or carry it. In addition, if teaching as a profession is noble, then teachers who serve as the agents that carry out functions of that noble profession also deserve to be accorded their honorable status. In other words, the nobility of teaching as a professional job spreads to the esteem of teachers at a personal level because the whole community of other professions owes gratitude to the teachers. It is from such views that Rayan (2019) argues that schools as institutional headquarters where operations of this noble profession are carried out should also be viewed with highest respect. In fact, all other professions that different people take pride in are clear products of the undeniable nobility of teaching profession within different schools. Therefore, it is a rational argument of this paper that since it is a fact that education is a noble quality, then anything linked to it shares in that nobility. Although it is not within the intentions of this paper to delve more into deep philosophy but it is worth mentioning that Sesanti (2018) made sense of how noble the status of knowledge is by referring to Aristotle who argued that knowledge in itself is a virtue. Without delving into Aristotle's arguments about knowledge as virtue, this argument may sufficiently serve as the reason that this whole paper is written on defense for the nobility of education and all its functionaries. It is also worth reminding that there was never a school that stood outside the community, that means all functionary elements of education could never be far from people if at all they are to benefit humankind (Sanches, 2012). Additionally, it can also be argued that if education centers were to be isolated from the communities then the production of all other professional known in the world would have been difficult. After having understood the noble status of teaching and education, it then seems worthwhile to get back to the argument of what a profession is.

According to Martin (1983), profession means that one has to undergo an intense formal training that is commonly of academic nature and be qualified in a particular recognized institution. In addition to that, a professional person will be registered with a certain representative body or organization of experts which will also license that individual as having a required expertise in that field of profession (Dickson, 2015; Rasulov, 2017). Strike (1990) also adds that professionals are governed by a code of ethics upheld by a particular body of professional ethics that also issues a code of conduct which highlights the procedures to be followed in some instances of unforeseen circumstances. This code of conduct might even stipulate the procedures to be followed in instance whereby a professional infringes the professional code of conduct. For instance, in the legal practice there are strict professional requirements that include "fit and properness" which is only known by the 'Lawyers Association Council', and not known even by most legal professionals (Pipedreams, 2010). In saying that, professionals should be having a community service, legal practitioners even have it in their code of professional conduct that they must serve articles, participate in judicare and so on (Zerra, 2018). Then that is why Walton (2015) and Taylor (2013) argues that the legal profession and medical profession are clear examples of what a profession looks like. At the same time, he argues that the status of teaching in terms of it being a professional job is questionable because it is not clear what can be called 'a good teacher' (Santoro, 2018). In this way, he argues that while a good medical doctor or a good lawyer is clear in terms of what it is, however it is not crystal clear when it comes to what a good teacher is. Then in my view the questions to be posed are; (i) should all professions be the same? And (ii) should it always be clear what a good professional is in all fields of practice like it is in medicine and law?

In my view, evaluation is not one of the requirements of the profession or non-profession of a job. Therefore, focusing on the question of what is a good teacher or is it clear to figure out that someone is a good teacher or not should be immaterial. This consideration can only be understood as being brought up to serve as a classist way that is a necessary tool to downgrade the teachers' profession. However, in an actual sense of things it is not even necessary to be a reason that grants teaching the status of being a non-profession. According to Coggins (2017), teachers undergo a serious and intense formal training within the academic institutions, and they go for teaching practice which serves as a practical part of the training required by Department of Education and SACE. SACE is an acronym which in full is South African Council of Educators and that is the council that works hand in hand with Department of Education in South Africa in making sure that all teachers have the requirements that are needed in their profession (Jordan, 2017; Troesch and Bauer, 2020). So, in South Africa someone needs to be registered with SACE before being recognized as a teacher in any school.

Additional to these structures teachers have an organization that represents them which is known as SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers' Union) which has their code of conduct as to monitor the teaching profession and professionalism (Eales and Bradly, 2018). In my view then it sits very reasonable and logical to argue that teaching is beyond just a mere occupation emanating from a calling or a talent, but it is a profession. I also would advance my argument to the point of saying that teaching is actually a foundational profession because it opens up for all other professions as it produces all kinds of professionals that the world knows of today. In addition, those organizational bodies that regulate teachers and educational conduct are professional bodies unless they can be proven to lack that element that makes other organizational bodies professional.

4. THE BASIC CLASSIFICATION OF JOBS AND RESPECT

The first in the listing is the skilled labor. The skilled labor refers to those kinds of jobs that need a serious and intense academic training with a plethora of academic qualifications (Jordan, 2017). It might serve better to take Zerra's (2018) and Rasulov's (2017) example of medical profession and legal professions as highly skilled labor. This kind of jobs require that someone must have dedicated a lot of time and money in formal education and training. It is also evident that one must be having a passion for the pursuit of that particular profession or job because it becomes a life-long quality of a person to such an extent that it becomes a quality of a person himself/ herself. My argument then would be that these kinds of jobs have a tendency of becoming embedded on people due to the fact that they come with such a status that they add value to the name of that someone who is a professional. Santoro (2018) becomes clearer in his narration that a skilled labor or a profession becomes not only a job like any other but it becomes a value/ status that serves as a quality name of someone. For instance, when one serves as a medical practitioner it somehow becomes necessary to put it before their names that it is "Dr", "Adv", "Eng" and so on. At this point where it has to appear before the name, the literal explanation for it is that it has become a quality that cannot be discarded when describing someone, otherwise leaving it out will mean that you are no longer talking about that particular one.

The second class of jobs is known as semi-skilled labor which is widely regarded as the secondary class of jobs with a secondary class or status of employees as well (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). According to Pipedreams (2010) and Totalprofession.com (2019) this class of people doing these kinds of jobs are not professionals and they have not gone that far in intense academic training and practice. This would logically mean that they are lacking in terms of what it takes to be accorded the status of being professionals even though they are above the bar of the unskilled labor employees. Being semi-skilled laborers also implies that although they have skills but those skills are not that advanced and sophisticated as those of the skilled laborers. Then in that case, some may argue that the level of respect accorded to them is justifiable to be lower than that accorded to the skilled laborers who also qualify to be regarded as professionals. In some cases, Dickson (2015) argues that teachers are semi-skilled laborers and they should not be accorded the status of being professionals. Nevertheless, the point that needs to be not ignored is that they are the people that have put much effort in the making of all other professionals that the world has. It therefore logically becomes incumbent that the respect accorded to all professionals be fully granted to the teachers. The question of what is a good teacher can be easily dealt with and be solved by looking at all professionals that exist in the world today and appreciate the skills of all teachers that were employed in making all these professionals successfully exist. I argue this point because it makes little sense to discredit teaching when it is the basic thing or profession that has highly contributed to the making of any profession that the world has in existence. In addition, if one really wants to know what a good teacher is, that person must go to the school and become a student so that he will have all time to assess and get out knowing what a good teacher is.

Teaching as a profession must be given its honor because it is actually a first profession that even gives birth to various professions known to the world (Rayan, 2019). Parsons (2020) corroborates that argument by even revealing that in the early ages anyone who should lead any community had to be knowledgeable and have a noble thing to teach that particular community. To further emphasize this argument, an example can be taken from the narrations of the holy books. For instance, powerful prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed were also highly esteemed teachers of their communities. Elhabashy and Abdelgawad (2019) relates that in traditional Kemetic spirituality a teacher is still considered as a very important person in the community. It is even amazing to the Kemets that nowadays many religions teach faith more than knowledge; perhaps those congregants do not honor education/ teaching profession. However, for a teacher to maintain the status of honor and respect s/he must always update his/her knowledge and be flexible with times. If needs be, teaching as a profession must reconfigure, reassert, redefine itself in order to reclaim its paramountcy. For that to be achievable, it is also mandatory that teachers must be morally upright personalities that are always of service to the global community. Like Sesanti (2018), Lynch (2021) argues that it is of utmost importance that a teacher be always

advancing in terms of knowledge, skills, and wisdom. The works of teachers in the world should enlighten scholars like Briggs (2017), Coleman (2017), Kovachek (2019) who seem to have a lot of negativity and degrading things to say about teaching as a profession. By the way, some scholars draw a lot of strength from Briggs and Kovachek to regard teaching as not a professional career. Therefore, the nobility of teaching as a profession does not only rest of the fact that teachers are the producers of all other professions, but they are also producers of all the paramount personalities known to the world today.

In further arguments, it makes sense to argue that teachers fully qualify to be credited as professionals because the fact that they are producers of all professionals is indicative of that there is something highly professional in them. Strike (1990) said “since it is impossible to produce what you are not, then it should never be rationally considered possible for a goat to produce a sheep”, in that vein I also submit that if teachers were not professionals it would have never been possible for them to produce all the professionals that they have over the ages produced. In this writing, I argue that there must always be a profound and logical examination of things before levelling any talk about them. I further argue that the emotions of pride and arrogance should be discarded when passing any judgement upon something. I propose that all thinkers must conduct critical and rational investigations before levelling any evaluative comment about anything. At core this writing is forwarded as my critical argument that teaching is fully a professional and skilled job which fulfills all the requirements of professionalism. If there are known requirements to be a professional it then requires that before one is judged as either a professional or not, evaluators must refer to those requirements and measure them against that person who is claimed as not a professional. I myself used this method, hence I conclude that from the findings at my disposal teachers are professionals because when judged against the known professional requirements they qualify. Within this paper, an effort has been made to offer one possible way to find the answer to the question of what a good teacher is. However, this whole paper should be understood as it is written, it is with a higher esteem to all the teachers and the various professionals they have produced over the ages. In the words of Sanches (2012) teachers are the fashioners of the society within their operational closets that should be viewed as a miniature of the bigger world.

5. CONCLUSION

In a complete sense, this paper’s argument serves to justify teaching as a noble profession and teachers as honorable professionals like those deemed serious professionals in other fields. The profound view that this paper holds is that classism might be discouraging and more perilous as colonial divisions were. Another problem that comes with division is despising and looking down upon some people in the society. However, the whole argument in this writing bears awareness and it explicitly states that there are different kinds of occupations or jobs in the world that service the community in different ways. My argument is that teaching is such a profound profession to such an extent that all other professions owe a profound gratitude to teaching and teachers of different disciplines in different institutions. Another aspect that I want to delve into in my research is the Afrocentric perspective on the prestige of teachers and the teaching profession. This is because it is recorded in the works of Ben-Jochannan (1974) and Tep (2002) that one of the most respected things in the ancient African wisdom was knowledge. Some African scholars/ philosophers like Semahj (2012); Jhutym (2019) and others have it in records that even in the African spirituality it was not faith that was revered but knowledge. In my decolonial mind it becomes clear that if knowledge is so much esteemed then it becomes clearly inevitable to hold such agents that spread it into higher prestige. Therefore, within this piece of writing I consciously have engaged in some form of holding epistemology and episteme beings into a prestigious position. This whole argument is to defend the idea that once it is apparent to any mind that teachers are creators of all personalities and other professions, it should then be clear that teaching, as a profession still deserves the nobility it once had in the past. All in all, this paper holds that classism has not only made scholars ignore the status of knowledge bearers but it has also come close to ignore epistemological worth itself in the society.

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