# Thoughts and Reflections on Nigerian Pedagogy Through the Lens of Engaging Minds: Influence and Personal Experience from the Four Moments of Educational Practices

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'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.'

-William Butler Yeats

**Abstract**
My aim of coming to Canada to pursue a graduate study in Education was to fulfil my life dream of becoming a university teacher. It was my hope that this dream will give me the opportunity to engage and inspire young people in issues of social and national development especially around citizenship education in my country that is de-valorised and polarised by bigotry, corruption and ethnic chauvinism. I believed earning a Ph.D. would position me in front of the university classroom to engage restoratively with young people and champion change towards new way of thinking. While the courses I have taken so far in a Canadian University- Memorial University of Newfoundland did not fail to give me that preparatory notch to achieve this humble ambition, most impacting was a course in Curriculum, teaching and learning. It offered me an added professional development to make me a better teacher and educator. Going through the four moments of educational practices, much of my time had been spent on soul searching, trying to evaluate the 'before and after' perspectives in my educational career as a teacher; this reflection has created a paradigm shift in my construction of knowledge and more extensively, my approach to school culture and discipline. While the theories, principles and critical thinking enabled by Canadian education offered me the academic preparation, the professional development acquired hopefully, will stand me in good stead in the praxis of teaching and learning both in formal and non-formal education setting This paper will therefore, explore the four moments of education as espoused by Davis, B. et al (2015) in "Engaging Minds" with a view to critically reflect on educational methods and practices in my home country Nigeria and bring to fore, the need for change in classroom and school administration in Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

"History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller
understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better
face the future."

Robert Penn Warren

It is amazing how understanding global history of education can help us to critically appreciate the dynamics and evolving trends in educational practices. Davis, B. (2015) opined that 'knowing a bit about the history of education is useful for understanding the structures of contemporary schooling and some of the nuances of popular interpretation of teaching', the global understanding of the history of teaching and learning offer me deeper breadth of knowing where we are coming from as a teacher and also, the challenges and histrionics that brought us to where we are as educators; the confidence that comes with this knowledge is profound and prepares teachers for emerging problems and issues in global education. Understanding the events precursory to standardized education helps the 'thinking mind' of a teacher to deeply appreciate the holistic perspective necessary for problem solving and re-thinking educational policy. In my soul searching as a teacher, I have often wondered why despite huge investment in education in Nigeria, there seems to be nothing to justify the investment; in the national policy on education (NPE) drafted in 1981 and revised 1n 2004; it was beautifully philosophised that 'Education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development'. (NPE, 2004). It is therefore, the most important policy instrument to accelerate national development and foster unity. The philosophy of Nigeria's education is based on: the development of the individual into a healthy, effective and productive citizen; the full integration of the individual into the community; and the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.' To what extent are these goals achieved? In terms of: National development, (Out of 188 countries, Nigeria occupy 156 in Human Development Index), National Unity, (Nigeria still struggle with nation building- secession struggle is active in the South-East region and shortly before now, Boko Haran terrorist group were reported to be holding territories in most part Northern Nigeria), Social Justice in education, (Access to equal education is unequal between the poor and the rich). Even to the distant eye, it is glaring to see that the national policy on education had failed the people. I believe that, this failure began with the introduction of standardized education practice which was nurtured after the British model

at independence in 1960.

## 2. Standard in Education

"Education is not a preparation for life...education is life itself".

John Dewey

In recent years, many philosophers of education have concerned themselves with the controversial issue of standards in education (Au, 2008; Covaleskie, 2002; Eisner, 2001; Graham & Neu, 2004; Lipman, 2004; Sacks, 1997). Certainly, the discourse on standards in education is not new. When European philosophers of education often discussed the nature and purpose of education, there was usually imbued within this discourse, thoughts and ideas about the criterion of a sound education. For instance, In the Republic, Plato (1992) can be seen engaging in this discourse when he disparages the sophists for believing that the standard for a good education is the putting of "sight into blind eyes", arguing that the measure of an education must be about redirecting the sight which already exists in every human soul, so that it looks "where it ought to look" (p. 190). Locke (1705) also contributed to this conversation. In some thoughts concerning education, he puts forth the view that a quality education must be about reorienting the body and mind to pursue that which "may be suitable to the Dignity and Excellency of rational Creature" (p. 137). For Locke, then, a good and proper education must be tangibly reflected in the ways and attitudes of the individual, so that it must be apparent in the "Manner and Abilities" of the person (p. 138). From the perspective of the philosophers then, the difference between an educated person and a non-educated person must be perceptible so that for Plato, the educated person must be able to redirect their lens towards the places where they ought to look, places where the non-educated person might not look; whereas for Locke, the educated person must be differentiated in their ability to discipline their body and mind.

At independence in 1960, Nigerians were enthusiastic and sanguine about the future for a country full of economic opportunities. Emerging leaders saw education as a means for achieving expected national fulfilment. Free primary education was adopted across the country to quickly accelerate the nation to meet the goal of Nation building, economic development and equal opportunities. Not too long after independence, educational priority was misplaced by the political class; education became defined as an instrument for social classification and positioning. To control and limit upward class mobility, education became heavily standardised even more than the curriculum of the colonial masters; people became separated by their educational qualification. This misplaced priority generated responses by educational institutions which redesign school curriculum based on HIGH STAKE examinations. Thus, the goals and objectives of the national policy on education were sacrificed for the greed of our political leaders who created a fertile platform for using education as a means for class mobility. Today in Nigeria, the primary essence of education is to pass state directed examinations which determine how far individuals can go in life. Students read for the exam and spent the rest of their lives on social media. Passing exams and getting a good job is what it means to be educated in Nigeria; knowledge therefore in the context of Nigeria, was linear and constructed as Euclidean geometry (Davis, et al 2015). This linear design of education limits knowledge construction of students and curriculum. Most importantly, standardization of education in Nigeria limit student learning because the system is designed to focus only on cognitive domains while ignoring many other qualities that are essential to success in life; many high school and university graduates in Nigeria have fallen short of making success in after-school life because they often lack important qualities such as curiosity, critical thinking, perseverance, and sociability required to engage with the complex world. Teachers in Nigeria have also been at the receiving end as they are 'forced' to teach to standard by educational authorities and parents who desire their children to pass state regulated exams. One of the effects of the increased number and heightened stakes of standardized tests is that the roles played by teachers have changed. Specifically, teachers' institutional tasks have increased because they are expected to take up work related to testing in addition to their regular teaching duties; instruction is also diminished by mandatory curricula that have been developed to prepare students for standardized tests. Such curricula require teachers to use prepared materials which they did not develop and which may not address the needs of actual students in their classes. In some cases, mandated curricula come with scripted lessons and/or pacing guides that determine when specific content should be taught, leaving teachers limited opportunity to make instructional decisions. (Valli, L. et al 2007). As cited in Flinders, D. et al (2015), standardised-based curriculum planning process hearkens back to that described by Chubberley in (Beyer &Liston, 1996) p, 19 almost a century ago , when he characterised schools as 'factories in which raw product (Children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demand of life'. In standardisation, ''curriculum is being organised scientifically for efficiency, deriving learning objective from social and economic needs and casting teachers as managers of the process of producing achievement scores''. (Flinders & Thornton 2013) p. 266).

Why have I spent so much time discussing the impact of standardised education? Simple; it has been the reason why the lofty promises listed in the national policy on education in Nigeria failed to deliver on expectations. Nigeria is a country with a population of 175 million people, abundant in human and natural

resources, and with a potential of being a leading economy or at least a middle power in global economy but today, the entire system is at a breaking point because as a nation, priority was misplaced for quantity rather than quality; education for social class mobility instead of education for life; education for self instead of education for collaboration and national development; education for high stakes test rather than education for creativity and critical thinking.  Although nations are experimenting on how best to improve on the standard already attained, for example Norway and Finland, Nigeria continues to glory in the traditional method of education which served as instrument for class segregation; no wonder therefore that children of our leaders attend Ivy league and blue-blood universities all over the world; their expectation is that their children come back home to sustain the leadership hegemony by taking up positions in politics and government where corruption is the rule of the game instead of adding creative value to the Nigeria society. However, the rallying cry for a robust and engaging educational system will continue to be loud as people from the bottom of the Nigeria society find opportunity in great universities outside the shore of the country to learn what it truly means to be educated. As a student in Memorial University in Canada, I have had a personal experience with what it truly means to be educated. In my experience, I do know that the implementation of authentic, democratic and systemic sustainability education is necessary in correcting the misdirection in Nigerian educational system; how these could bring about change to the crude and rudimentary system are discussed are also discussed.

### 3. Authentic Education

> 'Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, how men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world'. –
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> Paul Freire

Authentic education provides an opportunity for national change through collaborative learning that incorporates discovery, inquiry and induction in the learning process. Before independence, in most African nations, the system of education involved an authentic learning process where knowing is transferred from an experienced knower to a learner through the apprenticeship process. Iron and wood work, farming, hunting and trade were learnt in this mode, but the arrival of 'paper work' through western education change the mode of acquiring 'knowledge' and skill, education is now defined in terms of academics.  In November, 2016 in Nigeria, a presidential aspirant boasted on national television that students from his privately owned high school speak better English than a university graduate; to this politician, an educated individual is the one who can speak the Queen's English fluently.

It is an irony that there are loud voices calling for a change from knowledge linearly constructed to the traditional practice which we left long ago; a practice that focuses on real-world, complex problems and their solutions, using role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in virtual communities of practice. The learning environments are inherently multidisciplinary. They are "not constructed to teach geometry or to teach philosophy. Authentic learning environment is like some 'real world' application or discipline such as managing a city, building a house, flying an airplane, setting a budget, solving a crime, (Downs, S. 2007).  In the education of my dream, the student and learning environment are epicenters of knowledge building; knowledge building proposes a form of learning that is based on a process aiming at more coherent understanding. Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006) suggest treating students as members of a knowledge building community rather than learners or inquirers. In their view, effective knowledge creation results in the development of the actual community's knowledge. The knowledge building process is centred on 'conceptual artefacts' i.e. entities that support further knowledge advancement (Bereiter, 2002). Hence, knowledge building pedagogy means that creative knowledge building can be maintained in the classrooms where learners are active agents in the community's joint knowledge work (Moen, A. et al 2012).

As a teacher, authentic education practices help me to create in my students, cognitive capacity to think, solve problems, and create affective capacity to value, appreciate, care and develop the psychomotor capacity to move and apply physical skills. To be competitive in a global job market, Nigerian students must interact with the complexities of real-world problems. The greater their exposure to creative knowledge communities, the better prepared they will be "to deal with ambiguity" and put into practice the kind of "higher order analysis and complex communication" required of them as professionals. (Herrington & Oliver, 2000 p. 23). One component of authentic learning is that it targets a real problem, students' authentic engagement holds the possibility of having an impact outside the classroom, Audrey, R. (2006) stated that "The audience beyond the classroom changes the problem from an 'exercise' to something more important, allowing students to become emotional stakeholders in the problem'. Therefore, as Nigerians, our teaching strategy in authentic education must look towards the following four supporting themes.  1. An activity that involves real-world problems that reflect life beyond the classroom. 2. Use of open-ended inquiry based on complexity thinking skills and metacognition. 3.

Nigerian students must be trained to engage in the trafficking of knowledge through exchange and communication of discourses within a social learning community, and 4. Learning in Nigerian classrooms must proceed from project based reflections and mental analysis.

Pertinent questions to ask here are – Is authentic education a one size fit all learning model? What will authentic mode of learning mean to a student who has a unique way of knowing? Who is epistemological different from the dominant group in the class? Whose economic and social class is at odd with other students and who is mentally or physically challenged? This certainly is another bone for educators in Nigeria to chew in classroom pedagogy. Another moment in education practice that tends to answer these questions is democratic education. To be fair to all categories of students in a diversified and differentiated classroom, teachers must design their lessons to align with democratic mode of education that pay attention to social justice

## 4. Democratic Education

"Okay class, today we will begin reading Shakespeare's Henry V."
As I began to pass out the books, a series of voluminous moans and groans penetrated the already tense atmosphere.
"Not another book! We just read one! I hate Shakespeare! It's too confusing!"

Andrea Acker (2000)

What is democratic education? It is the Education that aims at promoting the intellectual development of the learner by expanding his/her boundaries of knowledge (Gerstmann and Streb, 2006) through an environment of disciplined inquiry and in an atmosphere where the learner is free to interact with both colleagues and teachers (Bottery, 1993).). To avoid a one size fits all approach, and promote democratic classroom, teachers are encouraged to empower students through the generation of their own knowledge in a manner that reflects their epistemological uniqueness and hunches. At the core of democratic education is social justice which gives space for fairness and equity in the classroom; all students irrespective of their origin, learning ability and social economic status must be treated fairly and given equal opportunity to succeed. More important to me as a teacher is epistemological justice; teachers must recognise that students are unique in their own way of knowing and must respect this uniqueness. Teachers must learn from the students to understand their different ways of knowing through critical engagement and dialogic interaction with students. This simply is based on the premise that students are different. Student participation in democratic classroom requires that significant learning takes place when the learner solves problems by himself/herself rather than being taught (Pedler et al., 2001). This is learner-centred education, a pedagogical framework that positions learners at the heart of the instructional process and not as passive recipients of information (Mahendra et al., 2005). Current educational trends compel educators to re-look at their teaching and instructional practices to accommodate groups of learners from among others, diverse backgrounds, slow learners, students on accelerated programmes and so on (Republic of Botswana, 1993; Subban, 2006). Some are analytical and rational and prefer the practical application of ideas and others are creative and artistic and like plenty of interaction (Hess, 1998; Tomlison, 1999; Anderson, 2005; Popham, 1993). Clark and Starr (1967) also argued that since students differ in their learning abilities-an inescapable fact of nature, teaching must adapt to their individual differences rather than being treated as though everyone were just alike. In this type of learning environment, the learner is not force-fitted into a standard mold but competes against himself/herself more than he/she competes with other students (Hess, 1989; Tomlison, 1999).

More than differentiated classroom, the whole school culture must reflect an integrated relationship and belongingness that pay less attention to control and power dynamics of the school; democratic education fosters when authority power is demystified and a horizontal relationship is developed between the student and the teacher on one hand and student- student on the other. The overall aim of democratic education is to create an environment that nurtures, respects and values human dignity irrespective of colour, language and social status of individual student. The opportunity for the student to pursue his/her educational rights becomes meaningless unless this is done in an environment that is safe and secure. No matter the amount and abundant availability of resources such as finance, material, and human, if the learning environment is terror struck, no significant learning can take place to the student (Thro, 2007). If the right to quality education is to have any substantive meaning, necessarily, there must be space in the classroom that is secure and free for learning (Thro, 2007).

## 5. System Sustainability Education

'If you take a more Darwinian point of view, the dynamics of the universe are such that, as the universe evolves in time, complex system arose out of the natural dynamics of the universe'-

Seth Lloyd

As a high school teacher, looking ahead towards change in the way we conduct classroom business in the form of teaching and learning, as well as my desire to see a Nigeria nation adequately prepared for a dynamic

21st century, it is a 'good deal' for me to conclude this paper with systemic sustainability education; it tends to hold possibilities for education that is futuristic and engages with time and space. Sustainability education must find space in the classroom. Nigerian students must understand that knowledge is distributed as fractals and patterns without a single paradigm or one best-fit way of understanding the world, that the world of knowledge is complex; it is an interconnected web that feeds upon change and dynamic flow of events. To be an effective teacher, we must help our student to journey into the complex fractals and patterns of 21st century's evolving global knowledge and understand the global differences that exist in a complex world- wide- web. Systemic sustainability education will enable Nigerian students be better prepared for emerging challenges that beholds them in an inevitable changing world.

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