



John Locke and the Practicality of Education: Bases for a Transformatory Curriculum in Today's Context

Roger Mondoue, Guillauma Gaston Nguemba, Ngecha Venista

Professor-University of Dschang, Dschang, Cameroon

Professor-University of Maroua, Maroua, Cameroon

Doctorate-University of Douala, Douala, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

John Locke, an influential Enlightenment thinker, posited that education is the cornerstone of personal development and societal progress. His philosophies, particularly regarding the role of experience and empirical knowledge in learning, provide a framework for developing a transformatory curriculum relevant to today's educational landscape. This article explores Locke's views on education, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning, critical thinking, and moral development. By analyzing Locke's principles in the context of contemporary educational challenges, we argue for a curriculum that not only imparts knowledge but also fosters critical engagement with the world. The need for adaptability in education is paramount in an era characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting societal norms. The article concludes by proposing a curriculum that integrates Locke's principles, thereby preparing learners to navigate complexities and contribute meaningfully to society.

Keywords: John Locke, education, experiential learning, critical thinking, moral development, transformatory curriculum.

1. INTRODUCTION

John Locke (1632-1704) is often regarded as the father of liberalism and a pioneer in educational philosophy. His seminal work, "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" (1693), advocates for an approach to education that emphasizes the development of reason and character over rote memorization. In today's rapidly changing world, where traditional educational paradigms often fall short, revisiting Locke's ideas can provide valuable insights into creating a transformatory curriculum that prepares students for real-world challenges. Philosophy of education in all human history past and present, have had a vast interest in educating individuals which as derived from its Latin etymology 'educare', and 'educere' means "to rear, nourish, or bring up"¹. Philosophy of education is the philosophical study of education and its problems, its central subject matter is education, and its methods are those of philosophy"². Questions in the philosophy of education are first and foremost questions about educational results. Locke on his part has employed the philosophical method of practical education which calls for education of actions, deeds, and demonstration for better mastery. Locke's philosophy of education answers the question of: *how should children be trained or educated, which form or type of education should be given to them and so forth*. Education is a necessity for healthy living in the society.³ That is, "if our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation."⁴ In our todays context troubled by social problems that requires a reconsideration of our traditional organization of schooling, which is intellectually and morally inadequate to take us through this contemporary society. Efforts regarding the engagement of students towards productivity remains crucial, which like implementing a Theory-technical education, seem key as of the moment towards a modern educational system.

To Locke, training a child to the activity of thought, should not mingle with "innatism" or innate ideas. learning, through Theory- technical education can shape the method of learning in school, this is because the quests for an educational system that can recognize and enhance the growth of individuals development as well as that of the society is important to unlocking potentials. On a go, main ideas which are introduced into a child's education should be few and important and let them be thrown into every combination possible. The child should make them his own and should understand their application

¹Cf Redden, J., *A Catholic Philosophy of Education*, Bruce Publication Ltd, Milwaukee 1949, p. 22.

² Nel Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, First published 2016 by Westview Press, Copyright © 2016 by Taylor & Francis Published 2018 by Routledge, fourth edition, New York, London . p. xiii

³ J. DEWEY, *contribution to the encyclopedia and dictionary of education*. In J. A. Boydston (Ed), the middle works, volume 13, 1983 pp. 399-405.

⁴ Dewey, J., *The School and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Second Edition, 191, p.43.

here and now in the circumstances of his actual life. From the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery. The discovery which he has to make is that general ideas give an understanding of that stream of events which pours through his life, which is his life"⁵.

This some how goes in the same line with Noddings, who holds that, education should be a preparation for life. To her, "Schools are clearly one of the places where children learn what it means to be a member of a community and where skills such as effective ways of handling conflict, effective decision making, and pre social behaviors can be nurtured."⁶ In this optic, education in simple terms is the engine by which enables to move forth every society. Educational vocalist like John Dewey traces in the opening chapter of his classic work *Democracy and Education* in a broadest sense that, education is the means of social continuity of life he pointed out that, the primary "facts of the birth and death of each one of the constituent members in a social group make education a necessity."⁷ This shows that to live, in individual and collective life, we need education and like the popular say goes, he who opens in a School door closes a prison door. The Cameroon education law for example states that the "general mission of education is the formation of the child in view of his intellectual, physical, civic and moral fulfilment and for his harmonious insertion into the society, taking into account economic, socio-cultural, political and moral factors."⁸ Thus education is supposed to prepared people for a good life as well self-fulfilling.

John Locke practical and educational output has been of great influence and bases in most part of the world, which Cameroon for example has for the pass time, engage its educational landscape undergoing significant transformations in recent years, particularly with the introduction of the Competence-Based Approach, signaling a pedagogical shift aim to enhancing the quality of education by focusing on developing competencies rather than merely transmitting knowledge. This piece however has as aim to explore on the conceptual relevance of John Locke's mode of operation to practical education serving as a base to a more transformatory plan suiting our today's world context, serving as a lens through which individuals could reach their full potentials while permitting the development and shaping of our society in another way.

2. EXPERIENCE AT THE SERVICE OF GENUINE EDUCATION

John Locke considers experience as the foundation to all knowledge which is gained from our senses. For Locke, education should focus on practical knowledge gained through experience rather than mere book learning. He believed that learning through doing fosters deeper understanding and retention⁹. This came to be prominent during the 17th century, when the English philosopher in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* argued that there is nothing in the mind which was not first in the senses. In this view, empiricism holds "that knowledge arises out of sense experience and is valid only within it".¹⁰ That is why the mind at birth is considered a blank slate on which experiences are imprinted.

According to Locke, all primary and secondary ideas, including abstract ideas, come either from the senses or the mind's reflection on sensory experience. John Locke after rejecting innate ideas, he thinks that experience is the base of education because innate ideas are like an obstacle to knowledge, so he wanted to establish a fundamental theory of human ideas where experience will serve as a true source of education. In his work entitle *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke place experience as the foundation meaning that an individual learns through his experiences, making education useful on an individual's life. Locke thinks we learn not to live, but to dispute; and our education fits us rather for the university than the world. But it's no wonder if those who make the fashion suit it ¹¹ we can then compare this to the thinker scholar of Fonlon who to him, experience can be said to enable him performs the task before him that is, "be able to see both deep and far, must have both insight and foresight, in order to recognizes, not merely ideas that arrived, but also ideas whose time has not yet come."¹² To Locke, Life is a continuous process of growth and development as well as education is also a continuous process which includes all the knowledge and experiences, that are acquired during infancy, childhood, boyhood, adolescence, youth, manhood or old age, and it can be formal and informal Locke then affirms that "I may say, that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education"¹³. Thus, education becomes the sum-total of all experiences that the child receives either in the school or outside because it is an important tool in one's life that man cannot do without it. In this wider sense, life is education and education is life.¹⁴

⁵ A.N. Whitehead, *The Aim of Education*, New York: The Free Press, 1967, p.2

⁶ Noddings, N., *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness*, New York and London, teachers college press, 2005, p.109

⁷ John Dewey, *Democracy And Education; An Introduction to The Philosophy Of Education*, New York, Columbia University press, 1916. P.2

⁸ The Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, Law No. 98/004 of 14th April, *To lay Down Guidelines for Education in Cameroon*, 1998, art 4.

⁹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, a new edition, London, Sold, by J and R Thompson, 1693, p. 15.

¹⁰ Norman Kemp Smith Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason August 27, 2013 Princeton University Macmillan and Co., Limited St. Martin's Street, London 1918 P125

¹¹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* 298-299

¹² Bernard F, *The Genuine Intellectual*, Second edition, Yaounde, Buma Kor Publishing house, 1978, p 117.

¹³ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p.5

¹⁴ Shri Nikunja Ranjan dash, *Philosophical foundation of education*, published by : directorate of distance and continuing education utkal university, © Copyright : Published : 2015 P.17

3. VIRTUE AS A NECESSARY CONDITION TO EFFECTUATE EDUCATION.

Locke emphasized on the cultivation of virtue and moral character in education¹⁵. He argued that education should not only inform, but also shape ethical individuals capable of contributing positively to society. This aspect remains crucial as contemporary education grapples with issues of social justice and civic responsibility. John Locke is convinced that moral education is more important than other kinds of education. Since the goal of education in his view is not to create a scholar, but to create a virtuous man who can sever his society. More so, the aim of education is to instill what Locke calls as principle of virtue you lay in a child, if you will redeem his desires of one pleasure, by the proposal of another.¹⁶ According to Locke, the goal of education is to create a person who obeys reason instead of passion or the appetitive part of the body as long seen with Plato. As a result, Locke declares thus:

virtue then, direct virtue, which is the hard and valuable part to be aimed at in education, and not a forward pertness, or any little arts of shifting. All other considerations and accomplishments should give way and be postponed to this. This is the solid and substantial good which tutors should not only read lectures, and talk of, but the labor and art of education should furnish the mind with, and fasten there, and never cease till the young man had a true relish of it, and placed his strength, his glory, and his pleasure in it¹⁷.

Locke in his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* explained how to instil virtue in children. He defined virtue as the combination of self-denial and rationality; “that a man is able to deny himself his own desires, cross his own inclinations, and purely follow what reason directs as best, though the appetite lean the other way.”¹⁸ To justify this, “virtue lies in a power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own desires, where reason does not authorizes them.”¹⁹ This is because virtue is harder to be gotten than the knowledge of the world²⁰ and if a man lost it, he will be ignorance of the world, and thus, this virtue is to be gotten from education that made it easy to practice. Virtues acts like concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope²¹. To Locke, the future virtuous adult must be able not only to practice self-denial but also to be seen rational. This is why Virtue makes education more valuable which without, the knowledge of the world, and civility, as well accomplished and valuable man can be found nowhere.²² Education cannot be complete without virtue. And if there is no virtue in education it means that education has lost its sense because of the presence of many vices in the world. John Dewey who in his discussion on educational role of teaching moral principles stressed that;

Introducing every possible approach was needed to capture students’ attention and improve their capabilities to create, build, and produce ways to increase their opportunities to change an absorption in self-endeavors into social service efforts. In this particular lesson plan, the authors, at every step of the process and in every question posed to students, strongly encourage active engagement and, for the most part, the design of the lesson that gives confidence to students to become social, and more critically thinking citizens²³

Moreover, he argues that parents should, attempt to create a ‘habit’ of thinking rationally since “Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed for everyone.”²⁴ To Locke, human beings were created to reflect God’s ethical and moral nature which could be confirmed in the assertion that;

Having laid the foundations of virtue in a true notion of a God, such as the creed wisely teaches, as far as his age is capable, and by accustoming him to pray to Him; the next thing to be taken care of is to keep him exactly to speaking of truth, and by all the ways imaginable inclining him to be good-natured. Let him know that twenty faults are sooner to be forgiven than the straining of truth to cover any one by an excuse. And to teach him betimes to love and be good-natured to others, is to lay early the true foundation of an honest man; all injustice generally springing from too great love of ourselves and too little of others²⁵.

Judging from the above, one will say with certainty that human beings have a God-given moral sense to determine right and wrong, and a conscience to prick them when they stray. Human beings have a God-given moral sense to determine right and wrong. Human beings has a sense of accountability as well as free choice, the totality of their response to this awareness of accountability, constitute their character, and indicates the extent to which they are

¹⁵ Locke, J, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* London: Awnsham Churchill, 1693, p. 30)

¹⁶ Ibid., p.56

¹⁷Ibid.,pp.84-85.

¹⁸Ibid., pp.34-35.

¹⁹Ibid., P.42.

²⁰Ibid., p.79.

²¹N. BURBLES “Authority and the Tragic Dimension of Teaching,” in *Teachers CollegeRecord*91, 4(1990), 477-479.

²²Ibid., p.126.

²³Mustafa Yunuseryaman, Special Issue *progressive Education: Antecedents Of Educating For Democracy*, International Journal Of Progressive Education, Volume 9 Number 1, © 2013 p.51

²⁴René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, translated with an introduction and notes by IAN MECLLEN, 2006, p.5.

²⁵John Locks, *Some thoughts’ concerning education*; p201

moral responsible individuals. Character building is thus one of the most important goals of education and religion".²⁶ This power is to be got and improved by custom, made easy and familiar by an early practice. Children should be used to submit their desires, and go without their longings, even from their very protection. The first thing they should learn to know is that, they were not having things which pleases them, but because it was thought fit for them this principle of virtue you lay in a child, if you will redeem his desires of one pleasure, by the proposal of another, cannot help him and it can only enlarge their appetite. Virtue as an imperative condition to effective education is very important because it is very difficult for children to succeed in education without the help of moral. A view long defended by Socrates who viewed that as a moral being it was better to live in an unjust society rather than do injustice. Locke haven laid the foundations of virtue in a true notion of a God, it teaches the children the moral aspect of life and make them to pray. A child should be a mirror of moral light in the world and to his parents. This can only be done through education, Locke then asserts that "I intend not a discourse of all the virtues and vices, how each virtue is to be attained, and every particular vice by its peculiar remedies cured: though I have mentioned some of the most ordinary faults, and the ways to be used in correcting them"²⁷ in Locke's view, every family has to consider virtue as the imperative condition for education. The most valuable moral characteristic of good parents tutors and guidance, to educate their children to do good for other people that is the development of an individual in such a way that the conditions for the development of all becomes the conditions for the development of each.²⁸

For happiness also requires that, one be lucky enough to live in a flourishing community or state that can help support the development of the moral virtues and the other non-moral qualities of a happy life. "So the virtues are necessary but not sufficient conditions for happiness. One must, in addition to being virtuous, be healthy, wealthy, and wise and have good fortune."²⁹

Virtue was placed first in the education of a gentleman by Locke as 'absolutely requisite to make him valued and beloved by others, acceptable or tolerable to himself Such virtue depended upon 'a true notion of God and a love and reverence for 'this Supreme Being' which was to be promoted by simple acts of faith—morning and evening prayers, the learning and recitation of the Creed. It also required the development of 'a power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own desires, where reason does not authorize them.'³⁰From the above we can notice that education cannot be complete without virtue. Coercion think that education is this very type of experimental field which provides room for children to exercise their own freedom and reason, although not on a voluntary basis but rather to the degree corresponding to their ability to control their inclinations, without parents waiving their position of responsible guardians taking care of and guiding children towards adulthood and self-responsibility³¹

4. EMPHASIZING ON AN INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING: A REFORM TO PRACTICAL CURRICULUM

Adopting a curriculum inspired by Locke in our today's context that prioritizes critical thinking skills, encouraging students to question assumptions and analyse information prepares them for informed decision-making in an increasingly complex world will go a long way to meet up with our challenges at some point.³²Locke's holistic view aligns with modern interdisciplinary approaches that break down traditional subject barriers. Integrating various fields encourages students to make connections and apply knowledge in diverse contexts.³³

This reminds us of Alfred North-Whitehead who equally calls for a reform in schools' curriculum which could go beyond "inert ideas". To him, each school should grant it's leaving certificates based on its own curriculum. To Whitehead, curriculum should as well fall under the three main methods which are required in a national system of education, namely, the literary curriculum, the scientific curriculum, and the technical curriculum, with each of these curricula including the other two.

It is however noted that, implementing a transformatory curriculum based on Locke's principles may face resistance from traditionalists who favor standardized testing and rigid structures³⁴. But overcoming this resistance requires demonstrating the effectiveness of experiential and critical learning

²⁶Annick M. Brennen, *Philosophy of Education* Northern Caribbean University, August 1999 p.69

²⁷ John Locks, Some thoughts concerning education, p. 103.

²⁸Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, in, *I am because we are, reading in Africana philosophy*, by Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee, *Amherst and Boston, University of Massachuset Press,2016*, P.68.

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³⁰Richard Aldrich, *John Locke UNESCO: International Bureau of Education*, vol. 24, no. 1/2, 1994, p. 61–76 ©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 1999

³¹³¹ This process does not need to succeed in finding one's life path based on reasonable freedom therefore for Schools it remains a problematic issue whether the category of progress and pedagogical optimism following from it could ultimately characterize Locke's pedagogical idea (Schouls, 1992, p. 225–232).

³² Facione, P.A, *Critical Thinking: What It Is and Why It Counts*, Measured Reasons LLC, 2011, p. 3.

³³ Beers, K, *Disciplinary Literacy in Action: How to Create a Systematic Approach to Teaching Reading in the Content Areas*, Newark International Reading Association, 2011, p. 45.

³⁴ Fullan, M., Langworthy, M, *A Rich Seam: How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning*, London, Pearson, 2014, p. 12.

methods. In the Cameroonian perspective for example, its educational landscape has undergone significant transformations in recent years, particularly with the introduction of the Competence-Based Approach that became instrumental with the ministries of Basic and Secondary education. This pedagogical shift has as aim to enhance the quality of education by focusing on developing competencies rather than merely transmitting knowledge. In an era defined by rapid change, fostering a mindset of lifelong learning is essential. Locke's emphasis on adaptability and continuous growth can enable curricula that encourage curiosity and self-directed learning³⁵ every form of education should give the pupil a technique and a science, there must be a dominant emphasis. The most direct aesthetic training should naturally fall in the technical curriculum which in this case, when the training is that requisite for some art or artistic craft it is of high importance in both a literary and scientific education.³⁶

Moreover, the integration of a technological base in the curriculum will stand as a gate way to realizing Locke's perspective in our present context since his ideas can be contextualized within a global framework that acknowledges diverse cultural perspectives on education since its inclusivity enable to foster a richer understanding of global citizenship among students.³⁷ However, a Theory- technical education creates students with awareness, to think critically and imagine their potential to come up with something usefulness in the society. Thus Theory- technical education will led to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as vocational bases. That is why Fonlon, asserted that the search for truth by the Genuine Intellectual helps to widen the existing store of human wisdom.³⁸

5. CONCLUSION

John Locke's educational philosophies provide a robust foundation for developing a transformatory curriculum that addresses the complexities of contemporary society. By emphasizing experiential learning, critical thinking, and moral development, educators can prepare students to navigate challenges and contribute positively to their communities. As we reflect on the practicality of education today, revisiting Locke's ideas can inspire innovative approaches that align with the needs of learners in a rapidly evolving world.

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³⁵ Candy, P.C, *Self-Direction for Lifelong Learning: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1991, p. 23.

³⁶A.N. Whitehead , *The Aim of Education* p.48

³⁷Merryfield, M., Kasai, M. *Building Global Perspectives in Teacher Education*, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 25-35, 2004, p. 25.

³⁸ Fonlon. B, *The Genuine Intellectual*, p.116

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