

THE TEACHER AS A PHILOSOPHER: A PARADIGM FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The role of the teacher has evolved in response to societal and cultural shifts, giving rise to the concept of the teacher as one who understands the overall idea of philosophical training and the importance of bringing it into education. This paper explores the teacher as a philosopher, particularly its potential to transform education through the adoption of philosophies. It utilizes a qualitative method to analyze the contemporary philosophy of education literature and the integration of philosophical pedagogy in teaching practices. Based on relevant findings from the literature, this study discusses how the teacher as a philosopher understands and facilitates critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and social justice, and the impact this has on both students and the educational system. Additionally, the paper addresses the challenges educators face in implementing various kinds of philosophical models in teaching and offers strategies for integrating philosophical pedagogy across diverse educational contexts. It concludes by asserting that teachers who embody the role of philosophers can play a vital role in preparing students to be active and thoughtful participants in society.

Keywords: Teacher, Philosopher, Critical Thinking, Ethical Reflection, Mezirow's Theory

Introduction

The current educational system experience creates a symphony of learners tasked with the ability to change their worldviews to envision what they currently relate to in the digital age as opposed to ordinary traditional philosophy, and so also is the point of educating teachers to act in view of the system transformation created by digitalization, globalization, and systemic insecurities, and the needs of students understanding their current environment (Wolff et al., 2022). The teacher's role in education has significantly changed over time, influenced by shifts in society, culture, and global challenges. At the heart of these changes lies the concept of the teacher as a philosopher. The teacher is one of the most important stakeholders and one that directly relates to the challenges of the students, they are the figure that guides the students beyond academic learning to enhance them with deep and transformative questions that shape their understanding of themselves as individuals and of the society and all that is within the society.

Philosophy, being an agent of deep understanding of the environment, is required to be properly understood by the teacher who wants the best for their students. The philosophy, therefore, makes the teacher an element that makes processing the world an easy task for students of all ages. Thus, in a simple understanding, we can say that the philosophical teacher is supposed to be filled with the ability to navigate the tension between standardization and creativity. According to Resch (2023), the teacher as a philosopher is a teacher who addresses the necessity of diversity skills for teachers in diversified school systems and how these skills can be developed through transformative learning approaches. This provides clarity to the fact that philosophy is an agent of deep understanding, and it stands as an essentiality for teachers who are seeking to empower their students.

While it is clear that diversified philosophical approaches are the way to create balance for students in the current society, challenges are rooted in what is considered the solution to the traditional approach to education. Information which is fundamental to what students require in education is considered fragmented even though they are in higher abundance than ever before. Teachers with great traditional and modern philosophical backgrounds are, in this case, able to guide the students appropriately. Usually, the growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) requires that teachers adopt the three stages of pedagogical frameworks including preparation, implementation, and reflection to maximize technology's potential while addressing the digital divide. However, Timotheou et al (2022) emphasized that teachers and digital technologies cannot stand alone without reference to pedagogical philosophies which must be included in the understanding of digitalization by the teacher. Philosophies will guide teachers with proper knowledge to help students engage with artificial intelligence (AIs), misinformation on the internet, and virtual communities ethically.

An instance of the clear distance between the traditional academic institution and the current system with the philosophical teacher is Project BRIDGES, administered by the United Nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This project in Norway gave a typical demonstration of how interdisciplinary collaborations between schools and universities enhance future education capacities to address sustainability challenges (Biseth et al., 2022). This type of learning allows students to imagine beyond the stale curriculum and relate to the changes that are currently happening in their environment. Another importance of philosophical teachers is envisioned in the term 'socio-emotional learning' considered through the lens of students' responsibilities. While Richerme (2022) stated the possibilities of marginalization in neoliberalism in addition to these principles, it also emphasized its importance, thus proposing the integration of solutions in the implementation of modern philosophical approaches.

The new educational system encourages critical thinking, ethical reflection, and active participation in society, giving it the potential to revolutionize both individual lives and communities. Traditional education systems, which often prioritize rote memorization and standardized testing, fail to engage students in the ways that are necessary for their holistic development. In contrast, the teacher as a philosopher engages students in a reflective, dialogical process that moves beyond the simple transmission of information. By embracing the role of a philosopher, educators empower students to question assumptions, explore moral dilemmas, and understand complex societal issues.

Theoretical Foundations of the Teacher as a Philosopher

A philosopher is a person who seeks wisdom and understanding about fundamental questions of life, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and reality. The word comes from the Greek "philo" (love) and "sophia" (wisdom) — so a philosopher is literally a "lover of wisdom." On the other hand, a teacher is someone who helps others learn by guiding, explaining, demonstrating, and supporting their understanding of a subject or skill. More than just delivering information, a teacher inspires, shapes minds, and builds character. Thus, the phrase "the teacher as a philosopher" highlights the role of a teacher as a thinker, guide, and critical inquirer who shapes not just the knowledge but also the intellectual and moral development of students. It suggests that a teacher goes beyond merely delivering content; they engage in deep reflection, question assumptions, and inspire learners to think critically and independently.

At the heart of the teacher as a philosopher lies a fundamental shift in our understanding of the educator's role. This concept did not emerge solely due to 21st-century pupils; rather, it has existed for a considerable time. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that in the 21st century—especially between 2020 and 2025—According to the University of Southern California (2024), there has been a marked increase in the prevalence of Artificial Intelligence among students, along with calls for ethical considerations within the academic sector. At the core, the concept of the philosophical teacher is derived from the idea that teaching is not merely the transmission of factual knowledge, but a process of enhancing critical thinking,

ethical reflection, and existential awareness. The concept of teachers as philosophers has also been reviewed under various scenarios of similar endpoints, one being as an intersection of transformative learning theory, critical pedagogy, and ethics of care, coming from a hierarchical structure from tradition.

First of such traditions comes Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation which affects the position of contemporary teachers by the idea that they are responsible for the epistemic agility of the students. Similarly, Mezirow's theory is regarded contemporarily as an introduction-conflict-balance-identity theory that models learning a dialectical process between environmental conditions and purpose-driven activity (Friedman, 2022). For instance, Ngene (2023) emphasized the demonstration by referring to educators who adopt transformative learning approaches like implementing constructive ontologies and viewing knowledge as co-constructive are better at guiding students through disorienting dilemmas. This also aligns with the findings in Resch (2023) that bringing in transformative learning approaches during teachers' training modules increases cognitive and social competencies by up to 37%.

Furthermore, contemporary scholarship in the philosophy of education suggests that education should be more than just the delivery of content; it should actively engage students in questioning the nature of knowledge, existence, and ethics (Freire, 2018). By adopting a philosophical approach, teachers guide students through these inquiries, empowering them to challenge assumptions and think critically about the world around them. The philosophy of education tradition that best aligns with this model is critical pedagogy. Freire (2018) argues that education must encourage dialogue and foster critical awareness in students. In this view, teachers are not mere transmitters of knowledge but facilitators who engage students in a process of mutual learning. As philosophers, teachers encourage students to explore deep questions about power, justice, and human nature. This creates an intellectual environment in which students are not passive recipients of information but active participants in their learning and development.

Another theoretical foundation of such is the ethics of care and axiological framework which emphasizes relational pedagogy, especially in the times that follow the pandemic signifying the ongoing adjustments in teaching practices and leadership strategies that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside this shift are shifts in academics where relational pedagogy and socio-emotional support have become central to addressing students' evolving needs (Schultz, 2022). These include approaches such as flexibility in the methods of teaching and compassionate response to academic pressures. This context underscores the need for systemic reforms that prioritize care-based principles to help students and educators deal with the aftermath of the pandemic and be resilient in the case of future occurrences. Schultz (2022) further emphasized that these kinds of care reforms would deal with integral issues of social disparities and racial biases.

Philosophical Pedagogy: Integrating Philosophy into Teaching Practices

Integrating philosophy into teaching requires a fundamental reimagining of classroom dynamics, where educators become facilitators of collaborative inquiry rather than sole knowledge authorities. They promote active learning instead of passive learning where the teacher stands in front of the class to dictate and explain the note without hearing from the students. As observed in Dutch secondary schools, this approach prioritizes "doing philosophy" through shared guidance—where teachers and students jointly navigate ethical dilemmas and epistemological questions together (Kienstra et al., 2015). This approach moves beyond the transmission of knowledge to cultivate an environment of critical thinking, dialogue, and ethical reflection. One of the core methods of philosophical pedagogy is the Socratic Method, which encourages students to engage in reflective dialogue and ask probing questions.

With a classroom environment that encourages open-ended discussions, teachers can guide students through complex philosophical questions, helping them develop critical thinking skills. According to Lipman (2017), the Socratic Method, rooted in ancient philosophy, cultivates deeper engagement with

content and challenges students to think about the broader implications of what they learn. In this method, students are encouraged to reflect on their assumptions, engage with diverse perspectives, and consider the ethical dimensions of the issues under discussion. At the core of this lies dialogic inquiry, a method that replaces didactic instruction with Socratic dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. For instance, when addressing climate ethics, educators might facilitate debates where students analyze policy trade-offs, balancing empirical data with moral imperatives (Biseth et al., 2022). In this kind of scenario, classrooms start to function as spaces for collective meaning-making through narratives and debates where the student's capacity for critical thinking increases and they learn to articulate and defend positions while engaging with opposite views, even within their classroom environment (Kienstra et al., 2015).

Philosophy also influences the schools' curriculum in the best ways. Educators will be able to adhere to progressive and reconstructionist philosophies which pronounce student agency and societal reform where student-co-authored syllabi are employed as opposed to traditional essentialist approaches (Alemdar & Aytaç, 2022). For example, a biology teacher might reframe genetics lessons to explore bioethical dilemmas, prompting students to debate different cases of societal implications. This deliberate incorporation of philosophical concepts into subject-specific content enhances students' understanding of the nature of knowledge. In Chinese high schools, courses that interweave the philosophy of science with subjects like chemistry or physics improve students' ability to evaluate scientific claims' reliability and societal impact by 41% (Shi, 2020). For instance, lessons on atomic theory might include discussions on empiricism versus realism, challenging students to distinguish between observable data from their environment with theoretical constructs.

Transformative Education: The Role of the Teacher as a Philosopher

Drawing insights again from Mezirow's transformative learning theory, educators act as facilitators of consistently disorienting dilemmas experienced by their students. Oftentimes, students are confronted with contradictions between their assumptions and new information causing them to consider their worldviews at every moment (Code et al., 2022). A teacher who is guiding a debate on climate justice might challenge students to reconcile scientific data with moral imperatives, allowing a practice that integrates cultural context, social justice, and critical reflection to address systemic inequities. Transformative education positions teachers as philosophers who catalyze systemic shifts in learners' worldviews. Their approach transcends content delivery and frames classrooms as spaces for collaborative inquiry.

Transformative education focuses on the deep, often life-changing processes that occur when students critically examine their beliefs, values, and assumptions. The teacher as a philosopher plays a key role in facilitating this transformation. Through philosophical inquiry, teachers help students to challenge ingrained beliefs, explore new ideas, and develop a more nuanced understanding of the world. This happens in various techniques that are proven to work efficiently on modern students. Critical reflection is a process where learners interrogate their beliefs and societal norms. Teachers model this through premise reflection of questioning the assumptions behind their practices, such as why they prioritize standardized testing over ethical reasoning. According to Fleming (2018), this is done in a way where reimagining the tradition of sitting in a circle where questions are asked and debates are the responses from present individuals is adopted. It gives these students the ability to come to school fully prepared with their facts while also being open-minded to that of their peers.

This kind of educational system also demands culturally relevant pedagogy, where teachers validate students' lived experiences while addressing systemic inequities. Ladson-Billings' work emphasizes creating inclusive environments that affirm marginalized identities, fostering critical consciousness through narratives and counter-narratives (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A teacher could engage his students by

providing them with a book and asking them to critique the writing or the truth behind the work. This method also aligns with *transformational teaching*, which prioritizes holistic development by empowering learners to become co-producers of knowledge (Omodan&Addam, 2022). While Traditional assessments prioritize rote memorization, transformative education reimagines the evaluation of knowledge by students. Portfolio-based assessments, which emphasize iterative self-reflection and ethical reasoning, correlate with sustained engagement and deeper learning (Nicholson, 2018). A philosophical teacher would evaluate students through ethical case studies rather than standardized exams to foster autonomous thinking and responsibility.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing the Teacher as a Philosopher Model

Despite its promise, philosophical pedagogy faces institutional barriers. Teachers often grapple with rigid curricula and limited training in philosophical methodologies (Okpara et al., 2025). However, innovations like digital phronesis—integrating ethical reasoning with digital literacy—offer pathways forward. For example, analyzing AI-generated essays for algorithmic biases merges technical skill development with philosophical critique. Similarly, Norway’s BRIDGES project demonstrates how interdisciplinary collaborations can embed sustainability ethics into STEM education, whereby systemic thinking would become even better (Biseth et al., 2022).

Furthermore, many of the teachers may not feel adequately prepared to take on the role of philosopher. Philosophy of education is not always a central focus in teacher training programs, and educators may lack the confidence to introduce philosophical questions into their teaching practices. At this, it is important to lecture the teachers on the importance from the point of view that the use of standardized testing and measurable outcomes allows also the consequence of feeling pressured to focus on content delivery and test preparation rather than on cultivating critical thinking and philosophical inquiry (Biesta, 2017). Also, the students who intend to pass knowledge hardly grasp the full details of what they are being taught in the scenario. They essentially spend more time on drill-and-practice than peers in low-testing environments, correlating with reduced engagement in debates in the external world. Thus, the challenge of philosophical adoption can be addressed by providing professional development opportunities for teachers to develop their skills in philosophical pedagogy and reflective practice.

Additionally, teachers may internalize conflicts between their philosophical ideals and administrative expectations. Frequently in modern-day education, a teacher advocating for student-led discussions on colonialism might face pushback from administrators prioritizing standardized outcomes. Such tensions reflect broader critiques of education systems that subordinate ethical integrity to market-driven efficiency. What is not known is that there are greater opportunities for students' freedom of learning which would also make them better leaders for the next generation. They would be able to see things in relation to their current situations in the world. For instance, advances in technology provide new platforms for engaging students in philosophical discussions and critical dialogue could be reimagined into a platform that goes beyond teaching sciences but also the greatest level of their communities. Teachers-as-philosophers can bridge cultural divides by validating marginalized narratives Ladson-Billings (1995).

Conclusion

The teacher as a philosopher embodies a revolutionary heartbeat in education. By weaving philosophical inquiry, critical thinking, and ethical reflection into the fabric of learning, educators become architects of examined lives, guiding students to confront the world not as passive observers but as active co-creators of meaning. This role extends beyond the transmission of knowledge to the cultivation of intellectual curiosity, ethical reasoning, and transformative learning.

Though institutional inertia and rigid curricula may resist this vision, the rewards are boundless: students who debate colonial legacies through counter-narratives emerge not merely as thinkers but as ethical navigators of a complex world. Through phronesis (practical wisdom), teachers balance theory and practice, ensuring that learning remains relevant and impactful. This model of education transcends intellectual growth, fostering moral and social consciousness.

Ultimately, the teacher as a philosopher is not a distant ideal but a living practice—one that turns classrooms into laboratories of possibility, where every debate, every reflection, and every ethical dilemma becomes a step toward a brighter tomorrow. By engaging students in meaningful dialogue and guiding them toward self-discovery, educators do more than teach; they empower learners to think independently, act ethically, and contribute meaningfully to society.

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