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IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ADOPTING SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION AND ADAPTATION INTO OUR EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This paper starts by defining the term ‘Social Reconstructionism and Adaptation’. After providing adequate literature review of the term, Social Reconstruction and Adaptation is presented according to Frances Klein’s (1985) Nine Curricular Elements step by step focusing on Objectives, Content, Learning Activities, Evaluation Procedures, Learning Materials and Resources, Time, Space and Environment, Grouping and Teaching Strategies separately to make the approach familiar for those who would like to implement social reconstruction and adaptation in their classes. The paper then discusses the strong relationship between the society and education by highlighting pros and cons of Social Reconstructionism in Education. Then Social Reconstructionism and Adaptation is analyzed in relation to the student skills and the role of the teachers. Finally, the significant question of ‘What can be done to Initiate Social Reconstructionism within our Schools?’ is answered and conclusions are provided.

Keywords: Social Reconstruction and Adaptation, Education, Society.

Introduction

Defining and delivering an effective curriculum is the most important professional responsibility for all educators. There is no clear, accepted definition of the word curriculum. The dictionary definition is a course of study but educational theorists invariably provide various definitions. Eisner (1979) classifies five major orientations in the curriculum design. These are: Development of Cognitive Process, Academic Rationalism, Personal Relevance, Social Adaptation and Social Reconstruction and Curriculum as Technology.

Social reconstructionism and adaptation is one of these most influential philosophies of education which attracted the attention of the educators. There are two ends of this design, “social reconstruction” and “social adaptation” like a spectrum. The philosophy behind “social adaptation” claims that the purpose of schooling is to socialize students, so that they will be working and contributing citizens. Students must develop the knowledge and skills to adapt to society and to work. At the other end of the spectrum, lies “social reconstruction” which focuses on the belief that the schools must work to solve the problems of society. The emphasis here is to help students to recognize the societal problems and act upon them to build a new social order. This approach focuses on building a new society rather than adapting to the existing system. However, a careful analysis on the literature of this topic reveals that social reconstructionism and adaptation are not used separately but as one expression. For this reason, this article uses the term as “Social Reconstruction and Adaptation”.

Lynch, M. (2016) declares that social reconstructionism is an educational philosophy that offers a curriculum that fosters students’ development. The aim of such curriculum highlights the generation of problem solvers as well as identifying and overcoming many noteworthy social problems that face nations, with diverse targets such as racism, pollution, homelessness, poverty, and violence. In short, student-centered philosophies should be the ultimate approach in our education systems.

What is meant by Social Reconstructionism and Adaptation?

There are two fundamental themes of social reconstructionism and adaptation. First one claims that the society is in need of change and the second one assigns education a leading role in changing the society. Advocates of social reconstructionism and adaptation are all the supporters of radical, social and educational reforms. Voirol, O. (2020) is one of those advocates who celebrates and displays contempt for social objectivity and reason by favoring individual preferences and subjective values.

A curriculum designed for social reconstructionism and adaptation italicizes the significance of democracy. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that it provides the students opportunity to focus on power as applied to class, gender sexuality, race and nationalism. The main themes of the social reconstructionist curriculum consist of cultural pluralism, human relations, politics of change, global issues, societal problems, analysis of language, autobiographical histories, and political/social awareness.



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Social reconstructionists prefer a world curriculum which emphasizes three major ideals: truth, brotherhood and justice. A social reconstructionist teacher feels an intrinsic desire to implement these ideals in schools and in society. The responsibility of the schools becomes to foster these ideals through curricular, administrative and instructional practices (Ozmon & Craver, 1992).

Eisner (1979) suggests that a radical social perspective leads to the social reconstructionist orientation to curriculum. According to him, this orientation aims to improve critical consciousness among students and, in this way, students become aware of the kinds of the ills that the society has and become motivated to learn how to get rid of them. Programs designed to serve this orientation focuses on controversial issues, what some writers in the social studies call the close areas of the society, religious values, sexual preferences, political corruption, race prejudice, and the alike. He summarizes the mission of social reconstructionism and adaptation as “the social reconstructions look at the society to locate its difficulties. Once they have been found, the program of the school is designed to help children understand these difficulties and to be able to cope with them “(p. 66). Similarly, Zgaga, P. (2015) contends that ongoing discussions deal in depth with the issue of education as a public responsibility and a public good. Unfortunately, there are some authorities hesitate coping with the consequences of accepting public responsibility for education and some old fashion teachers who believe that their role is just to present the subject matter to their students.

Social reconstructionists are very much concerned with the future. Human actions are approached from a moral perspective, as every action carried out by an individual has a consequence for the future. Teachers’ direct student activities towards humane goals that result in better social improvements for all. Olivia (2005) argues that “branching out from Dewey’s philosophy, the reconstructionists followed a path that led them to propose using the school to achieve what they considered to be improvements in society” (p. 161).

A teacher who accepts social reconstructionism and adaptation as his/her philosophy of education can be described as a kind of a designer of a new society or a transformational leader or a change agent. He/she should be willing to continue a change process not only in professional life but also in real life in society during his/her lifetime. To be open to new changes, tolerance for ambiguity, interpersonal communication skills, and using a good command of language are the musts for a social reconstructionist teacher. He/she should create a conducive atmosphere to inquiry within the classroom, so that the students can question the assumptions of status quo. The classroom atmosphere should enhance analysis, criticism and action research. In this kind of education, classroom management loses its significance because most of the learning is through community building. As Sadker and Zittleman (2010) declare student-centered philosophies takes place focusing on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future.

Historical Background of Social Reconstructionism and Adaptation

Throughout the history, supporters of social reconstructionism existed. Plato, Counts, Brameld, Freire and Giroux are some of the most influential figures who suggested social reconstructionism as a way forward in education. Ozmon & Craver (1992) state that throughout the history, all the social reconstructionist philosophers existed, had common two major premises:

1. “Society is in need of constant reconstruction or change
2. such social change involves reconstruction of education and the use of education in reconstructing society” (p.171).

The name of the most famous philosopher in education, Plato, must be enough to guess how old are the roots of social reconstructionism. Plato was among the first philosophers who recommended education as the most significant agent for social change. He designed a future state “The Republic” in which he proposed education as a construction tool to build a better and newer society. He was ahead of his time as he saw the problems of society as the interest charges, wars and profits and prepared “Laws” to eliminate all these evil.

Counts (1889-1974) as an activist- scholar, tried to popularize social reconstruction among educators. He recognized that education was the means of preparing people for creating a new social order. He even has a very famous book on this; “Dare the schools Build a new Social Order?” in which he argued that teachers should consciously foster ideas and values supportive for the new social order. Counts believed that education must contribute to the establishment of the new cultural patterns and eliminate social evils. Hursh & Ross (2000) claim that Counts identifies classroom teacher as an influential figure to help societal transformations to occur.

Brameld (1904-1987) was another influential figure in inviting reconstructionism into the field of education. He initiated social reconstructionism in reaction to the realities of World War II. He has several important books such as “Towards a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education”, “Education as Power” and “Patterns of Educational Philosophy”. Osmon & Craver (1992) state their views on Brameld as “Brameld viewed reconstructionism as a crisis philosophy, not only in terms of education but of culture as well” (p.



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177). Moreover Kai (1994) argues that Brameld urged the prospective teacher not only to acquire professional knowledge, but also to take responsibility for becoming a world citizen. Brameld consistently insisted that teacher education should consider and approach cultural issues and ways of exploring descriptive and normative cultural values.

According to Osmon & Craver (1992), Brameld thinks that the reconstructionist curriculum is both a centripetal and centrifugal force. It is centripetal because it draws the people of the community together in common studies and it is centrifugal because it extends from the school into the wider community. This result in a dynamic relationship between school and society, which in turn results in, causes cultural transformation.

Social reconstructionists, like the critical theorists, believe that systems must be changed to overcome oppressions and improve human conditions. Paul Freire (1921-1997), as a social reconstructionist, believes that humans must learn to resist oppression rather than becoming its victims or oppressing others. To do so requires dialogue and critical consciousness, the development of awareness to overcome domination and oppression. Rather than depositing information into students' heads, Freire saw teaching and learning as an inquiry process in which the student must discover and rediscover the world. He has a very famous book called "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1968) in which he highlights the disadvantages of capitalist education and lays the base for revolutionary education. However, Glass (2001) articulates that many reviewers of the book criticized Freire's this popular book for the deficiency in recognizing the strengths of the traditional education and for offering complete revolutionary.

Similar to Freire, Giroux, as a social reconstructionist, suggests that students must resist the dominant forces of society. According to his view of education, teachers and students must act as if they were living in a democratic society. In 1983, he wrote a book called "Theory and Resistance in Education" to express his views.

Social Reconstruction and Adaptation According to Frances Klein's (1985) Nine Curricular Elements

Objectives – The mission of social reconstruction and adaptation is to create a more just, equitable and humane society in which, students learn how to learn, and shape a better society. Osmon & Craver (1992) emphasizes primary goals of social reconstructionism as the betterment of society, improving society through student work in classroom and community. Eisner (1979) states that social reconstructionism derives its aims and content from an analysis of the society the schools is designed to serve. He identifies the mission of the schools, which support social reconstruction and adaptation as their orientation, to provide or to be sensitive to the social needs and to design programs that meet the needs that have been identified before. For example, if the society needs more architects, dentists or engineers, the schools will act as an agent through which they will be provided.

Content- Problems and dilemmas of society should be studied. Design of the curriculum is not subject centered but societal centered. Olivia (2005) claims that "the subject matter to which all youngsters should be exposed consists of unsolved, often controversial problems of the day such as unemployment, health needs, housing needs, and ethnic problems" (p. 162).

Eisner (1979) asserts that needs are derived from social problems. Drug abuse, sex education, parenting programs, and ecological studies are examples of these ills. He adds that the curriculum acts as a vehicle to remedy such problems. For example, in the arts, the content of the curriculum may focus on the hidden forms of persuasion in the advertising, the impact of new technology on the character of art forms or the ideals conveyed to the young by the mass media. He places the emphasis on the questions that citizens have to answer or that in some significant ways affect their lives. In short, Eisner (1979) says that in social reconstructionism "one uses the knowledge provided by the academic disciplines as a tool for dealing with what is socially significant" (p. 65).

Learning Activities-The most common learning activities used by social reconstructionist education are problem solving (how obstacles can be overcome so that a more ideal society can be created), interviewing people to formulate solutions, testing hypothesis, becoming meaningfully involved in societal activities as citizens of the society. Students, most of the time, analyze research and relate the underlying issues to the institutions and the structures found in the community they live in. In short, they are extremely active during the learning process.

Osmon (1992) emphasizes the importance of project-based learning in social reconstructionism and states that "the curriculum should be action oriented by engaging students in such projects as collecting funds for worthy causes, informing citizens about social problems, and using petitions and protests" (p. 192). He adds that "students learn from such activities as voter registration drives, consumer research, and anti-pollution campaigns, in which they can make a genuine social contribution while they are learning" (p. 192).



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Evaluation Procedures-Testing is not applicable as individuals or groups study different topics. It is not possible to measure a prescribed content or skill. Evaluation emphasizes process rather than content. The main focus is on the provision of activities and what is learned through them. In other words, there is formative evaluation and ongoing feedback. The instructor mainly evaluates how effective the problem was carried out and solved.

Learning Materials and Resources- A social reconstructionist approach to education does not favor covering a textbook as the content would be limited. There is a great diversity of materials. Original sources or community sources are preferred such as reports, letters, proposals or newspapers.

Time –It is not limited with classroom hours as students’ study outside of the school most of the time involved in research, interviews and observations. Students use time as the study dictates. Time is unstructured and flexible.

Space and Environment-As the curriculum cannot be separated from the current events, students are enrolled in activities which focus outside of the school rather than inside. Schooling is extended beyond the classroom because the students are required to work in the community.

Grouping – Group work is central to social reconstructionism. Olivia (2005) defines group consensus as the basic methodology by which solutions to the problems are solved. Also, one can see a lot of committee work in social reconstructionist education.

Teaching Strategies- Teacher plans activities with students, which permit students to make informed choices and reflect on their consequences, take risks of success or failure and share the development implementation and an evaluation of a plan. Ozmon (1992) declares that social reconstructionism requires teachers to be internationally oriented, humanitarian as well as future oriented. Inquiry based learning, community-based learning, dialogue and the use of multiple perspectives are commonly used teaching strategies. The focus of teaching is on the student experience. The teacher creates opportunities for students to take action on real problems like violence, hunger, inflation, or inequality. Educators indoctrinate their students with socialist and collectivist values or they use experimentalism method and reflective inquiry to contribute to the social improvement. Reflective inquiry and practical action help students to examine their ideas in practice. Among the other popular teaching strategies of social reconstructionism, one can see the group processing, problem detecting and solving, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, conflict resolution and cooperative learning.

Relationship Between Society and Education

The school is actually a social institution, which affects the students’ human potential and accordingly, the future of our society. For this reason, education given at schools is crucial. The problems of society can be actually solved by the students if the mission of their education system aims to enhance the critical consciousness of the students to realize the social problems and controversy and act upon them finding remedies. Using the curriculum offered at the school, social reconstructionists claim that all the societal problems can be solved. Olivia (2005) states that schools must be a tool in finding a solution to the social and the political problems.

Unfortunately, the school education is generally misunderstood as involving obligatory attendance, timetabled subject courses, using drilling or memorization techniques to students to convey the subject matter required by the fixed curriculums set by the schools, administering exams, quizzes, etc. In short, the education system in most of our schools help students to adapt the existing system of society rather than motivation them to build a new social order. Borgeson (1929) defines curriculum as an important instrument of the educative process and adds that it should emphasize activities and methods, which will prepare a student to the life of the society he will survive.

According to Voelker (1935), in the past, the aim of our education system was to prepare a functioning citizenship, however nowadays this social aim changed to an individualistic aim imparting cultural knowledge and developing vocational skills to help students to survive. He claims that our educational institutions must be responsive to the social needs.

Nowadays, as there are problems with taxes, unemployment and other societal problems, teachers like many other people suffer due to these problems. In a time like the present, in many schools, thousands of self-sacrificing teachers are not complaining but working although their salaries do not satisfy them and some of their jobs are not permanent. Accordingly, all these negative aspects of life prevent teachers to go beyond the subject matter of the course they offer and to help students to shape their values and norms by evaluating the societal problems.



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Moreover, Voelker (1935) argues that “if our schools are to raise the kind of citizen that can go out into the world to render social service, the teachers of these schools cannot be oblivious to what is going on outside of their cloistered walls” (p. 410). He adds that the teachers must be sensitive to the dynamic elements of our social order and must act as the instrumentalities of the forces of progress and reconstruction.

The students rarely question the system of the nation, or the disorders it has, they are brought up. They just live their lives without caring for their future. They do not see that future is in their hands and it is the teacher’s responsibility to show them this potential. Fishman and McCarty (1996) view instruction as a tool, which helps students to realize their individual and social realities as alterable constructs. Social reconstructionism helps students to shape and maintain their realities. They should be motivated and feel the desire to make their nations better. Once they correct the social order in their nation, in a way they attempt to make the world better. They should be guided to contribute to their selves and also to the community they live in by their teachers. As Baldacchino (2000) states” according to UNESCO definition, education refers to the entire process of social life by means of which one develops personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge fully, for the benefit of the self and community” (p.302). Likewise, Sadker and Zittleman (2010) explain the purpose of education through Social Reconstructionism as an encouragement of “schools, teachers, and students to focus their studies and energies on alleviating pervasive social inequities and, as the name implies, reconstruct society into a new and more just social order” (p. 284).

Pros and Cons of Social Reconstructionism in Education

Social reconstruction is a philosophy of achieving social change, social justice and equity by changing the various systems and schools are one of these systems (Banks, J. 2012).

There are advantages of using social reconstructionism within the school. To start with, it is a student-centered philosophy and requires active participation of students. Students are seen as active and effective change agents. As they are involved actively in the learning process, they learn more. Students will have intrinsic motivation, as they will study and work for their own society. Furthermore, they will improve many significant life skills such as problem solving, group working, self-image and conflict resolution.

Since the topics of the schools concern the society, all the educational institutions will be more valued by the government and society. To fulfill the requirements of reconstructionism, there will be a match and correspondence between the structure of the school and society and this match will prevent any kind of dissonance to occur between the schools and society.

With no doubt, the biggest contribution of social reconstructionist design is to the society. The education students take will directly improve the society and justice.

Besides the advantages, social reconstructionism also has got some disadvantages. It is very difficult to design a curriculum, which meets all the needs of society, as it is very difficult to agree on these needs. Moreover, as the individual is defined in terms of society, to improve the unique potential of the students will be prevented. School becomes a place to conform the needs of society. For this reason, the medium offered at school will shape the future of the student into what is required by society. For example, the students might be interested in studying arts but if there is no need for artists, they will be asked to become doctors. This will prevent their intrinsic motivation. Moreover, most of the teachers are traditional and not ready to teach this way and this will cause many problems. As well as the teachers, the resources and materials offered at school have all to be changed, which will cost a lot of time and money.

Social Reconstructionism and Adaptation in relation to the Student Skills

Social reconstructionism places a lot of emphasis on the student skills. Jenks (2004) explains one of the most important responsibilities of education and curriculum as growing youth, creating and recreating the social systems that make up an evolving society. Unknown future is up to what students learn at school. For this reason, curriculum should focus on to develop the knowledge, skills, thinking and creativity of the students to the highest level.

To begin with, social reconstructionism improves students’ ability to solve problems, which is a very important skill in surviving. Eisner (1979) clarifies the aim of social reconstructionism and adaptation to help students to recognize the real problems and try to overcome them. He defines two aims for social reconstructionism. These concern the knowledge and the skills. The former is to use the knowledge provided by the academic disciplines as an instrument to deal with socially significant issues whereas the latter focuses on helping the students acquire the skills needed to fit into the society, largely as it is.



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Moreover, social reconstructionism fosters students' self-confidence and self-image that are crucial to become a healthy member of society. Teaching students team work and dealing with conflicts and problems, will in turn increase the self-confidence and the self-image of the students. They will realize the potential they possess in changing the social environment they live in. According to the view of Ten Dam and Volman (2003), for a person to function as a healthy member of a society, self-confidence, positive self-image and communicative skills are crucial.

Creativity is another significant skill social reconstructionist orientation to education requires. Jenlink (2004) describes the function of education as preparing its future citizens through fostering social creativity by being involved in designing a renewed generative social order, which in turn will guide the growth of conscious evolution. He describes students' responsibility as taking care of the future.

Being critical is another important skill required by social reconstruction. Jenlink (2004) reports that schools should aim "educating active critical citizens able to critically question, construct meaning and imagine possibilities of a new future" (p.239). Students should be taught to question traditions, traditional values and the value of academic content! By the same token, Piazza, M. (2014) affirms that during social reconstructionist education, the prompts of the lesson acknowledge for intense group discussion, which in turn arises intense felt topics. Only throughout such dialogues students become active learners and critical citizens.

The Role of the Teachers in Social Reconstruction and Adaptation

It is generally accepted that teachers lead society. They are the leaders and policy makers most of the time, as they can easily impose their values onto many students. For this reason, in addition to the school matters, teachers should also pay attention to the controversial issues in society. Schools, as agencies of education, reflect or try to change knowledge, beliefs and values of the society. In short, teachers can contribute a lot to make the necessary changes for the society in cooperation with the students and the society members.

Voelker (1935) articulates that the schools must serve the needs of the society and "they will teach the individual to consider the social bearing of his conduct, they will train him in the suppression of his antisocial impulses and they will provide him with social motivation" (p.411). In the school with social vision, the whole group will be made socially conscious. It will be taught to consider the effect of its collective conduct upon its individual members and upon the general welfare and it will acquire the ability to act cooperatively in the protection of its community interests and in the conscious direction of its own progress.

Moreover, Ottaway (1962) also asserts that the teachers are the most powerful instruments in affecting the society. He argues that teachers should encourage the children to be aware of their choice and respect their freedom. This is the best thing to do until they grow up but still everyone has the responsibility to change the society until students grow up!

What can be done to Initiate Social Reconstructionism within our Schools?

To start with, the teachers at schools must believe that they are responsible to raise the awareness of their students in social order. Together with their students, they should identify the social disorders and create solutions to overcome them. As Tacker (edited by Desforges, 1995) suggests, "personal and social development through the curriculum cannot be left to chance but needs to be coordinated as an explicit part of a school's whole curriculum policy, both inside and outside the formal timetable" (p.257). The National Curriculum council in England emphasized that personal and social education (PSE) is extremely important for school curriculum (p.257). The expectation of (PSE) is to prepare the students for their future role within a wide democratic society.

Secondly, as it is the teacher's responsibility to awaken their students, they should be given training on achieving this responsibility. Brameld in his famous book "The teacher as a World Citizen" published in 1974, claims that the prospective teacher should be required to receive a minimum of six years of professional preparation after high school graduation. First two years of this will be within the program of general education that examines and appraises our age of revolutionary change, and then the rest four years will focus on fundamental knowledge of the sciences and arts, as these help directly to the problems of world order (cited in Kai, 1994). Therefore, a teacher should provide her students acquire citizenship as well as professional knowledge.

Teachers should not worry about the age of their students; teachers have a lot to contribute to their students' lives at every age. I am a university student who always apply new techniques, find ways to make my students alert of what's happening around them, in their society, in their prospective sectors etc. From the perspective of social reconstructionist theory, Esmaeili, Z. et al. (2015) depict that 'the role of universities as the education center is to identify the crises in society and to create some conditions to



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help to solve the intended crisis by the public opinion especially students' (p.271). Therefore, the universities also play a significant role in solving the community crises by carrying out the necessary research and preparing mentally and pragmatically the students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, designing a curriculum according the orientation of social reconstruction and adaptation is not a simple matter. There is no single, concrete conclusion to whether or not to adopt a social reconstructionist form of the curriculum or methodology in our schools. Olivia (2005) states that social reconstructionism has not been a popular endorsement at the schools. It can be clearly observed that the other four orientations towards curriculum such as cognitive development, academic rationalism, curriculum as technology or personal relevance are used and adopted by many schools but social reconstructionism has the least impact in our education system. The striking question is "Why?". Is it because there is no societal problems to be solved? or Is it because the teachers do not care about the disorders of the society? or Is it because no one knows whose responsibility it is to build a new social order?

Montessori (1942) believes that the solutions of all problems will be found when we find enough power in ourselves to find a higher plane and this will be possible when the child pushes humanity onto this new higher plane. These hopes will come with the new education. I think her impressive question "is anything unchangeable?" shows that it is worth trying social reconstructionism and education in our schools.

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