

Philippine Public Basic Education amid the COVID-19 Pandemic through the Reconstructionist Lens

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Abstract

This paper seeks to establish the applicability of the reconstructionist philosophy to the situation of Philippine Public Basic Education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explores the following areas to create a better and compelling standpoint: (1) reconstructionist perspective in education, (2) reconstructionist education towards students' development, (3) role of teachers in reconstructionist viewpoint, (4) reconstructionism on Philippine Education amid the pandemic. Reconstructionism emphasizes social change to bring reform to society. It considers education as a medium for rapid and continual change. This educational philosophy serves as a guide that transforms the outlook of the educators in this time of the pandemic. As the country gears the Modular Distance Learning to address learning continuity, reconstructionism provides a backbone to support its implementation. After the thorough analysis, reconstructionism has motivated Filipino teachers in reflecting again on the importance of education. Believing that the world of tomorrow will be governed by today's youth; it is important to empower the younger generation to ponder about the future and to instill in them the awareness that they will help determine the future according to their own goals and ambitions. No matter the crisis, learning continuity is the battle cry of the Philippines' education department since education is deemed to be a conscious human activity since time immemorial. Students are regarded to be future drivers of reform dedicated to and active in social transformation. The contexts for learning are diverse and now goes beyond the four walls of the conventional classroom set-up. Learning has now become a more personal responsibility if learners are to survive from a reconstructionist perspective. Reconstructionism is an imperfect philosophy, but it can provide sound judgment and practical implications to arrive at logical educational measures. The most impeccable educational philosophy has yet to be developed. In this sense, humans are

necessitated to ponder on the classical measures such as reconstructionism that have been proven through time.

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic, Philippine Education, Philosophical Paper, Reconstructionism*

Introduction

"We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive."

- *Albert Einstein*

The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to an unforeseen transformation in the education sector that has culminated in a new reality. Educational philosophy such as reconstructionism exposes the problem and provides guidance that can shed light on the current crisis on educational and societal challenges. To **Craver and Ozmon (2008)**, reconstructionism leans on two main premises, (1) society necessitates constant change and reconstruction, and (2) education serves as the pathway in reconstructing society. It can be recalled in the accounts of **Breithorde and Swiniarski (1999)** during the economic depression and civic strife, social accountability has taken precedence in education. Curriculum improvement was made that revolved around social problems and termed it reconstructionism. It can be construed that the reconstructionist system of education calls for school improvement, a broader program, and a larger network to help more children under the umbrella of public education.

Reconstructionist educators bank on a program that highlights social change as a primordial concern of education (**Cohen and Gelbrich, 2018**). In this sense, social reconstructionists claim that processes need to be modified to transcend inequality and better human conditions, especially in this most challenging time. Taking a trip to the memory lane in various eras, education served different purposes. Thus, it is a conscious human activity that needs to be fulfilled. Even amid this pandemic, governments are constantly amending their administrative approaches to address the serious effects and to curb the proliferation of the COVID-19 cases. As **Wyman (2020)** notes, policy responses like ensuring harmonized action and implementing emergency measures such as the closure of academic institutions, the activation of distance learning solutions, and the promotion of other learning infrastructures, are designed to mitigate the effects on the education sector. With this **Kidd (2002)** highlights that reconstructionists claim that humans' current needs are limitless that deliberate actions through social reform and education must take place to address the needs of the learners in this time of the pandemic.

In the Philippine context, modular distance learning is the parents' most favored type of modality to attain learning continuity in public basic education. Before, the concept of education is to attend classes within the bounds of the classroom walls. Now, the notion is different. All the stakeholders are emboldened to accept that education does not only happen in the classrooms all the time. The assertion of reconstructive education for students in this new normal of learning is that they will look forward to a successful future by investing in their learning regardless of the drastic change in the educational system in this time of crisis.

Hence, this paper seeks to establish the applicability of the reconstructionist philosophy to the situation of Philippine Public Basic Education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It also explores the following areas to create a better and compelling standpoint: (1)

reconstructionist perspective in education, (2) reconstructionist education towards students' development, (3) role of teachers in reconstructionist viewpoint, (4) reconstructionism on Philippine Education amid the pandemic. After the thorough elucidation of each topic, it will be narrowed down to a conclusion that will provide a synthesis of the paper.

Reconstructionist Perspective in Education

Education is meant to act as a medium for rapid and continual change from a reconstructionist point of view (**Craver and Ozmon, 2008**). **Brameld (2000)** regarded reconstructionism as a crisis philosophy. He saw civilization at the crossing point: one path led to the demolition of humanity, and the other to redemption only if people tried. While he had clear thoughts about the route humans were supposed to follow, he stressed out that he was by no means sure which path humans were going to take. With this, it can be construed that humans should set survival targets through effective education. Amid this pandemic, although it is not guaranteed that learning continuity through modular instruction would succeed, stakeholders are pursuing it since humans are necessitated to think and generate solutions to meet the educational ends of the learners. Social regard for education is emphasized reconstruction as it is a tool for social change and adaptability.

Reconstructionists regarded the school as the appropriate social institution in advancing social change because its capability to bring forth authentic change is more extensive and inclusive compared to others (**White, 2015**). In his book *Education as Power*, **Brameld (2000)** tells that schooling aims to have a democratically empowered society that can be achieved through reconstructionism, which is a theory of values, means, and ends. It can be gleaned that schools as an institution that are believed to bring about significant changes in the society must be free from conventional ideological agenda so they can develop innovative values and goals. Distressed by this pandemic, a stronger focus on society-centered education meeting the needs of all social classes is being encouraged by this philosophy.

Riley (2006) concurs that the concerned society should invigorate the education sector including the administrators, teachers, and prominent scholars to exercise reconstructionism principles and values in innovating educational plans, developing curriculum, and formulating contextualized pedagogical models suitable to the present challenge of humanity.

Brameld (2000) substantiates that emphasis on curriculum that focuses on social reform is highly considered in this philosophy. Philippine education leaders have the monumental task of the transformation of the learning continuity during the pandemic. Modular distance learning may not be a new thing, but this is not the traditional practice regarded in the Philippine basic education system. The face-to-face class has always been the practice in the schools. However, this pandemic has resulted in a new reality where the stakeholders in education are emboldened to accept and implement this kind of learning modality to contain the proliferation of the virus. Since reconstructionism is rooted in the pragmatist view, it provides a practical answer and logical solutions to the problem in the education sector.

There may be a new and drastic change in the educational landscape, yet it is in this perspective that learners are prepared and equipped with the capacities to become change agents. Since students are the foremost concern in this educational crisis, it is also high time for them to experience social challenges that will involve them in formulating viable solutions for their future. The reconstructionist perspective believes in its truest sense that

students can adapt to this change only if they are facilitated by appropriate and more knowledgeable adults or models.

Reconstructionist Education Towards Students' Development

The world of tomorrow will be governed by today's youth; it is important to empower the younger generation to ponder about the future and to instill in them the awareness that they will help determine the future according to their own goals and ambitions. Instead of seeing it as something that passively unfolds, there is a need to focus on the future as something that they can make into a new realm and continuous opportunity out of their initiatives (**Craver and Ozmon, 2008**). This philosophy, focused on students, aspires to inculcate a move to contribute to the betterment of the world. It reflects on global challenges that are divisive and uses current affairs as a springboard for the thought process (**Ganly, 2012**). To be successful, this strategy seems to be a more pragmatic response aimed at reforming current social systems, including schools, through such a range of techniques, in ways that allow them to be more sensitive to people's needs. The value of collaborating to bring forth transformation is taught to these students. Teachers are expected to infuse what happens with what they experience in their classes so it will become relatable for children.

Attitude modification is advocated in reconstructionism where individuals are challenged to improve their lives than it was before. Reconstructionist education philosophy argues that school programs need to be structured in such a manner that they provide individuals with the resources required to promote social transformation and to conquer structural inequalities (**Irabor, et. al., 2020**). John Dewey emphasizes that education required a social awareness that would contribute to change. Also, Dewey firmly insists that the teaching approach must be child-centered, that is, considering the child's preferences, needs, and potential that can contribute to self-reliance. (**Murrow, 2011**).

Seemingly, reconstructionists agree that planning and thinking about the future are healthy ways to provide individuals with alternate societies to envision, and they feel that in schools where teachers can inspire students to become future-oriented, this kind of ideology should be embraced. In curriculum designing, the focus should not just be on what to offer to learners to make them conform to society. Instead, it puts a premium on what learners can offer to society to bring about the required change having been trained through the unique programs. Thus, the role of reconstructionism as an educational philosophy is that it allows students to learn or advance reasoning skills and problem-solving skills.

It is just fitting to revisit the concept of reconstructionism as it merges self with societal awareness (**White, 2016**). As education is viewed as a tool to reconstruct society, greater solidarity and harmony for humanity are aimed. In this time of the pandemic, children's education is put at stake. Even with the foregoing situation, education, as a conscious human activity to build a better society, must continue. Equitable, continued, and inclusive education for all learners especially in the umbrella of public education which comprises a great volume of students must be deliberately sought as part of the focused goals for survival. In this educational challenge, teachers as front liners have a major duty to take the concerted step to realize these goals. It is in this context that teachers and other stakeholders are instrumental to bring about firm changes in the educational landscape that would benefit all the learners no matter the societal standing to survive.

Role of Teachers in Reconstructionist Education

Reconstructionism has motivated teachers in reflecting again on the importance of education. The school is in a proactive position to resolve the situation and provide the appropriate framework for action particularly in times of educational crisis (**Craver and Ozmon, 2008**). So, as an emerging school of thought, reconstructionism has been at the forefront of those who aim to make education a more active social influence. Although some are perplexed with the role of teachers as agents of change, this philosophy continues to promote the role of the educator as a principal agent of change and worked to transform schools in ways that would serve as an alternative and improved society.

Unfavorable results might be the effect of action without thought but thought without action is no longer justifiable. Thereby, regardless of non-intervention in the context of human life, educators have helped contribute to some degree to the issues that humanity faces (**Craver and Ozmon, 2008**). With the foregoing crisis, the education sector is largely seen as the catalyst to provide logical alternatives and changes in the educational system. Education is being acknowledged as an important tool to improve human civilization as manifested in history. In this case, there are certain modalities implemented to assure learning continuity even amid the pandemic. In the Philippine context, modular distance learning, in the public education sector, may not be the perfect modality but it provides a reasonable and practical solution to avoid the disruption of educational service to the learners while ensuring their safety from the virus scare.

With this, reconstructionists clarify that there is no need to distinguish between knowledge and action. Knowledge can contribute to the action, and measures should be taken to explain, change, and improve the knowledge that is executed. Actions aren't more ideal than thoughts but bringing an idea into practice helps us as Dewey claimed, to reevaluate it in the spectrum of human experience and through subsequent thinking, it will be rendered as a strengthened idea. Reconstructionists would like to connect thinking to experience, philosophy to reality, and intelligence to advocacy.

It is in this instance according to **Postman and Weingartner, as quoted by Craver and Ozmon (2008)**, facilitating for analysis and change is being encouraged to be done by teachers rather than mere dispensers of knowledge. Students' passivity robs them of any opportunity for an innovative role in examining and designing materials or in making informed choices. Learning is not anymore confined in the four-walled classroom and teachers must lead the learners on how to think for themselves using the scaffolds provided in the learning materials. Limiting the challenges of the learners is not the trend in reconstructionist education, instead, teachers are bound to challenge the limits of thinking of the learners.

White (2016) emphasized that the role of educators as social reconstructionists is to analyze society and discuss ways in which social structures are unequal to the present crisis so that school leaders can become mindful of developments in policy and learn about how to accomplish social-cultural transition through education. With some drastic changes in the educational landscape caused by the pandemic that has resulted in a new reality, this motivated the writer to seek the applicability and relevance of reconstructionism philosophy on uncovering the situations of Philippine public education amid the pandemic.

Reconstructionism on Philippine Education Amid the Pandemic

Reconstructionism is a philosophy that stresses solving social problems and building a healthier society and a more democratic environment. Reconstructionist educators rely on a program that highlights social change as a priority of education. Also, one of the founders, George S. Counts, suggested that schools and educators should be instrumental in helping to create a modern social order (**Salazar and Muego, 2020**). To achieve this, reconstructionist educators are regarded to be reformists of education rather than reactionary conservatives, passive moderates, or soft-hearted liberals (**Craver and Ozmon, 2008**).

The education process should not be confined by the limitations of traditional ideology, but it should be allowed as a modern alternate view of the rebuilding of civilization universally and the social development of citizens into a modern society that has become the means and end of education today (**White, 2016**). To limit the proliferation of the spreading of the COVID19 virus, various learning delivery modes have been implemented to achieve learning continuity since face-to-face classes are discouraged. **UNESCO (2020)** has emphasized that learning cannot be stopped. During the pandemic, many countries around the world have launched different responses to continue the educational process, hence, the emergence of distance learning. There are online learning portals introduced such as google, TV broadcasts, guidelines, tools, prepared video lectures, and other online channels.

However, the adoption of this method would trigger problems for children who have restricted access to the Internet and the underprivileged. It was revealed that the Philippines' internet connectivity is the lowest in Asia. There is also a need to reskill and upskill the teachers to migrate to online learning, distance learning, and other forms of blended learning which are desirable in this new educational landscape (**Toquero, 2020**). Reinforcing, in both areas of technology and pedagogy, is needed.

The theory of reconstructionism states that global culture is in turmoil and that life, as people understand it, will come to a halt unless existing trends are rehabilitated (**Bourne, et.al. (2017)**). In the case of the Philippines as revealed by **Toquero (2020)**, if migration to virtual classes is deemed as the answer for learning continuity, the nation is unprepared for the launch of emergency distance education. During this crisis, the country is already struggling to have alternative delivery of education, as most schools in the Philippines were in traditional classroom settings before COVID19. The situation is unavoidable, however when the country's education sector must face its toughest challenge to date, that of dealing with emergency distance education. Undoubtedly, online education is a daunting task for educators to build a nurturing interactive classroom in the public basic education system that enables students to learn and connect collaboratively. Weak or unstable internet, connection costs, technophobia, inadequate 21st-century technological skills, and lack of facilities are some of the barriers to distance learning for students.

The shift to distance and remote learning simply stressed the existing divisiveness within and among the various societies in the Philippines. The inequities of those who can provide such technological tools as computers and internet connectivity have simply become more evident. It also offered a starting and focus point to what has become the monumental challenge in the sector of education, from those who fully transitioned to virtual class, to those left with the dilemmas of face-to-face classes, and to some other forms of distance learning that are not inherently carried out digitally (**Asia Society Philippines, 2020**).

The situation in this new reality presents a monumental challenge in the decision-making of every leader in the Philippine education sector (**Tria, 2020**) most especially that the goal of education is to recognize the needs of the cultural crisis and to re-align the needs to the fundamental values (**Suardipa, 2019**). Reconstructionists often address risks in today's culture and see the potential for progress, and educators are seen from this viewpoint as key vehicles for social reform (**Bourne, et.al. (2017)**). Hence, it is in this premise that Philippine education's battle cry is learning continuity.

As a response to the need to continue education amid the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 crisis, the Philippines through the Department of Education collaboratively developed the BE-LCP for the school year 2020-2021. The said plan is the outcome of different consultative activities. The inputs from the discussions, surveys, and analyses were unified in planning the framework.

Focusing on the dimensions of availability and affordability, the level of technology access in the country in terms of connectivity often mirrors geographical and financial marginalization. And though technology access may be available, it may be expensive for them on a low income. It is practically suggested that a remote learning approach through Modular Distance Learning is the safest and most empirical approach in the Philippines' public basic education sector. A print module is used in print modular learning delivery. This modality appears to be preferable since it does not necessitate access to power, technology, and internet connectivity. This is also the best form of the modality of learning for places in which a high percentage of cases are detected. However, a great deal of proper guidance by an adult or a parent is essential, particularly for learners in the basic education system (**Cahapay, 2020**).

The way of solving world problems is the development of universal social order, and formal education will become a central agent in the restoration of the social order. Reconstructionism can be mirrored in this educational decision by the Philippines' education sector. This radical school of knowledge aims to reshape the framework of the past and to create a brand-new structure of life through educational institutions. This might be an imperfect solution, but it is the most practical for the Philippine education setting to survive and thrive. The need to endure in this unprecedented time of crisis is being emphasized from a reconstructionism perspective while safeguarding the welfare of every Filipino learner.

The goal of the BE-LCP is therefore to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of learners, teachers, and staff during COVID-19, while at the same time exploring ways for education to proceed during the crisis. Particularly, the BE-LCP was built with a regulatory structure sensitive to the "new normal," bearing in mind the constitutional obligation to always protect the right of all people to quality public education (**De Villa and Manalo, 2020**).

It is in this situation that teachers should have a vastly increased outlook towards the situation, welcome transition, and consider the possibility of moving out of their comfort zones. On other hand, students are seen to be future drivers of reform dedicated to and active in social transformation. The contexts for learning are diverse and now goes beyond the four walls of the conventional classroom set-up. Learning has now become a more personal responsibility if learners are to survive from a reconstructionist perspective.

Conclusion

Reconstructionism emphasizes social change to bring reform to society. It considers education as a medium for rapid and continual change. This educational philosophy serves as a guide that transforms the outlook of the educators in this time of the pandemic. This radical philosophy can be mirrored in the way how the education sector of the Philippines decided to pursue learning continuity amid the crisis. As a philosophy, it challenges and invigorates the stakeholder to implement educational plans, revisit the curriculum, and formulate contextualized pedagogical models appropriate to the current dilemma of the country's education sector.

As the country gears the Modular Distance Learning to address learning continuity, reconstructionism provides a backbone to support its implementation. Although there are certain ambiguities caused by the drastic changes in the educational setup, education leaders are necessitated to carry decisions that are coherent, meaningful, and coordinated toward logical and practical educational measures. The transition of learning delivery in the Philippine public basic education system may not be seamless but this is an ambitious move to continually provide the learners under the public education umbrella with uninterrupted learning.

Conventional face-to-face classes have been the notion of Philippine education even before the time of the pandemic. Now that reform must be made to meet the needs of the current society, the education sector is in a proactive position to resolve the situation and provide the appropriate framework for action particularly in times of educational crisis. Education leaders and teachers have not remained elusive to the changes. On the contrary, they have put their best foot forward to surpass this educational challenge by producing self-learning modules and by planning ways of distribution and collection.

It is in this aspect that reconstructionism has motivated teachers in reflecting again on the importance of education. Believing that the world of tomorrow will be governed by today's youth; it is important to empower the younger generation to ponder about the future and to instill in them the awareness that they will help determine the future according to their own goals and ambitions. No matter the crisis, learning continuity is the battle cry of the Philippines' education department since education is deemed to be a conscious human activity since time immemorial.

The perfect approach to any educational challenge has not yet been invented to dovetail the needs of humans. Reconstructionism is an imperfect philosophy, but it can provide sound judgment and practical implications to arrive at logical educational measures. The most impeccable educational philosophy has yet to be developed. In this sense, humans are necessitated to ponder on the classical measures such as reconstructionism that have been proven through time.

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