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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION,
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**CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTIONISM AND THE NIGERIAN
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

By

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Abstract

The paper discusses the educational philosophy of Cultural Reconstructionism in terms of its basic tenets, and in terms of the manifestations of the philosophy in the Nigerian educational system. An attempt has been made to find out how certain manifestations of the philosophy in the Nigerian educational system could affect the cultural and social development of the nation.

It was found that the Nigerian educational system aspires to promote cultural reconstruction in the Nigerian society. However, and in its bid to do this, it succeeds in laying more emphasis on scientific and technological reconstruction than on moral reconstruction. The effect is that cultural crisis manifested in inhumane use of our technological advancement may be inevitable. Therefore it is recommended that the educational system increases its emphasis on the moral realm of education too.

Introduction

Cultural or Social Reconstructionism is a modern philosophy of education compared to ancient philosophy such as Idealism or Realism. Cultural Reconstructionism advocates that schools should get actively involved in the cultural reconstruction of the society. Moreover, it stresses that the cultural reconstruction should be a continuous affair whereby promoting continuous reconstruction of the societal cultural heritage (Brameld, 1956; Counts, 1932). The school cannot afford to stay neutral in the direct programme of social revolution, content only with transmitting the cultural heritage of the people; it should also serve as a major social agency that would reconstruct the existing social order in the light of changing needs of modern life. In essence the school is not to be seen only as instrument of cultural preservation but also as instrument for building new social patterns that would blend the new and the old into a viable cultural synthesis.

To the extent that Cultural Reconstructionism advocates an education that manifests continuous reconstruction of our social heritage, it can be said to hinge on Dewey's philosophy of

pragmatism. This is because Dewey's pragmatism also stresses that knowledge is acquired through 'the complete act of thought' which in the long run involves continuous reconstruction of our experience (Dewey, 1916). Moreover, to the extent that Cultural Reconstructionism advocates the blending of the old and the new into a viable cultural synthesis, it can further be said to hinge on Hegel's view concerning the unfolding of the Absolute Idea. This is because Hegel's view of the Absolute Idea derives from the process of continuous conflict between partial truth (thesis) and its contradiction (antithesis) which results in newer and higher idea (a synthesis) but which in turn still generates new conflict (Hegel, 1874). In effect, the point of departure between reconstructionism and pragmatism is the stress of reconstructionism on urgent and holistic reconstruction as against the stress of pragmatism on piecemeal and rather evolutionary changes. Similarly, the point of departure between reconstructionism and Hegelianism is the stress of reconstructionism on utopian-oriented actions that are deemed to help in moving things from a less desirable state to a more desirable state as against the interest of Hegelianism in abstract ideas. Reconstructionist emphasis is on translating knowing into doing such that everybody, school or society, can serve as change agent.

The reconstructionists would stress that the new technological and industrialized culture needs blending with the old culture of agrarian neighborhoods, otherwise there would be cultural lag in the progressively industrialized communities: for the scientific and technological innovations would certainly tend to outdistance the moral consciousness and social organization of the agrarian culture. There would then be maladjustment between the inherited social ideas and the contemporary material technological orientations. In effect, the school needs to harmonize process of change such that would prevent cultural lag which might result in maladjustment between industrialized culture and the culture of the agrarian neighborhoods and in turn lead to cultural crisis.

When a man is ill-equipped to cope with changes occurring in his environment there would be cultural crisis cognitively and attitudinally. Besides, cultural crisis is also manifested when people refuse to relate the realities of the contemporary technological communities to the axiological, religious and humanistic dimensions of life. For instance, man's technological development of sophisticated materials are not sometimes being put into humane use. Rather, they are used to cause wars, thermonuclear destruction, violence, environmental pollution, and to threaten man's

continued existence on earth. With multifarious scientific discoveries there should be progressively better conditions of living among human beings generally, rather than progressive widening of the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Certainly such widening of gap should belong to the pre-scientific age. In effect there are indications that the modern scientific culture is not being harmonized with the axiological dimensions of the old agrarian culture. Thus, the cultural reconstructionists would stress the need for the school to harmonize our scientific-technological culture with the axiological and humane dimensions of our old agrarian culture (Counts, 1932; Shimahara, 1973)

It can be seen that Nigerian educational system aspires to transmit our traditional culture as well as promote the development of cultural reconstruction among the people. (National Policy on Education, 1998). The educational system also aspires to promote scientific and technological developments as well as moral development (National Policy, 1998). Therefore it would be in order to find out how our educational aspirations in terms of cultural and social revolution really agree with the educational philosophy of cultural reconstructionism. Thus the paper would attempt to find out areas of agreement and disagreement with the view to determine the actual tendency of our social reconstruction and then criticize such tendency accordingly.

Reconstructionist Education

Reconstructionist education considers the school to be a major social agency which would take the lead in identifying areas of cultural lag among the people and in promoting desired cultural synthesis and reconstruction in their societal cultural experience (Counts, 1932). The student should therefore be taught to identify aspects of the old agrarian culture, that need to be discarded (e.g. bigotry, superstitions, ignorance) and aspects of the new that also need to be discarded (e.g. the inhumane use of scientific innovations); he should then be led to harmonizing the good axiological aspects of the old with the good aspects of the new. This ensures cultural revision and renewal. The teacher and the student need to conjointly embark on programmes of cultural reconstruction such that the present manifestations of cultural crises (e.g. environmental pollution, wars, widening of gap between the wealthy and the poor) might be curbed. There is the urgent need to curb the cultural crises because the manifestations threaten the very existence of man on earth (Brameld, 1947). The programme of

education that would curb the cultural crises needs to be an integrated one, wherein actual cultural problems of the society that warrant immediate and direct solutions would be studied from multiple perspectives and necessary actions taken to curb the problems under study (Brameld, 1959). Thus anti-pollution campaigns may have to be mounted, adult-literacy drives may have to be elaborately pursued, political consciousness campaigns may also have to be considered. Also internationally oriented humanistic programmes regarding issues like population explosion, energy crises, biological warfare, nationalistic chauvinism, greed and hazardous transportation may be aspects of the reconstructionist education programme.

In the educational endeavors, Brameld (1959) is of the opinion that the school needs to bring its influence to bear upon the society; but he does not rule out the possibility of the larger society bringing its influence to bear upon the school too. Thus educational forces should be directed from the school to the society as well as from the society to the school, in which case the reconstructionist education would manifest "Centrifugal" forces (i.e. from the school to the society) and "centripetal" forces (i.e. from the society to the school) rather than what has hitherto being the case, wherein only the society determines educational programme and the school is left out of similar determination for the society. Reconstructionists agree that democratic processes are supposed to be employed to enlist the interest and participation of students as well as other members of the society in the reconstructionist educational programmes (Brameld, 1956). Besides, education whether in a democracy, a communist or Nazi setting, promotes the particular ideologies, beliefs and values of the societies that operate it. Therefore democratic societies should use their educational system to promote the continuous reconstruction of their democratic culture. It follows that the democratic education should encourage respect for the worth of every individual, allegiance to human equality, freedom and brotherhood (Counts, 1939). The Society for Educational Reconstruction established in 1969 for the furtherance of reconstructionist goals also stressed the importance of democracy and peaceful world community (utopia) as major reconstructionist ideals. However, some reconstructionists have also maintained that the programme of education for cultural reconstructionism should employ the findings of the behavioural sciences in harmonizing cultural differences (e.g. Brameld, 1959).

A Critique of Reconstructionist Education in the Light of Nigerian Polity and Morality

The foregoing shows that the advocates of the educational philosophy of cultural reconstructionism are convinced that democracy is a cultural value that needs to be promoted in the activity programmes of reconstructionist schools. The value is as important as the promotion of anti-pollution campaigns, registration drives, and public enlightenment campaigns. Democratic ethics and the humane use of the emergent technology towards the promotion of utopia are thus two basic themes of the reconstructionist educational programme. One then might wonder whether the message of reconstructionism has a forceful impact on a society whose socio-political ideology is Communism, Nazism, or some other such ideology; and whose level of industrialization is not so great as to make one ponder on humane or inhumane use of technology. In essence, if the traditional cultural values of Nigeria in terms of politics for instance, favour communism rather than democracy; and if this traditional political culture would really support de-emphasis of inhumane use of technological devices would we still think that this philosophy has much relevance for Nigeria? Certainly in this regard, the philosophy might be said to have less relevance for the nation. However since culture involves a dynamic process, Nigerian political, economic, religious and socio-cultural values eventually change everyday, we would still need to get involved in cultural reconstruction of our socio-political experience such that the society continuously changes for the better rather than for the worse. The tendency at the moment is that the Nigerian society is changing for the worse particularly in terms of our morality. Otherwise there would be, no need for the institution of War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), and the constant revision of our modern political system – through military coups, counter coups, and civilian uprising. Thus reconstructionism has a clear message for the Nigerian society in terms of the constant reconstruction of our socio-political culture through the schools.

Some Manifestations of Cultural Reconstructionism in the Nigerian Educational System

Is our educational system alive to the harmonization of the old with the new such that it makes significant impact in restructuring

the society in the light of changing needs of modern life? The general impression is that the new 6-3-3-4 system of education is alive to such responsibility but this seems to be more authentic in terms of vocational and technological developments than in terms of moral development. This is said to be the case because of the prevalent moral laxities in the society which have given rise to the institution of War Against Indiscipline (WAI), and Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), and similar bodies. Thus there is still the need for our educational system to actively explore ways of promoting certain aspects of our culture which would enable our people to live in a social milieu that runs minimal risk of engaging in inhumane use of our technological devices.

In the National Policy on Education it can be found that cultural progress as well as scientific and technological progress are aspired to (National Policy on Education, 1998). Thus the school child is expected to identify with the traditional culture of his people in the process of learning the language of his mother tongue plus one other major Nigerian language (Hausa, Yoruba or Ibo) (National Policy on Education, 1998). The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) is also given the responsibility for encouraging research institutions towards the improvement of our traditional culture and the promotion of scientific and technological development (National Policy on Education, 1998). Further, the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) is instituted to promote industrial and technological training in the schools and industries (National Policy on Education 1998). Thus the policy expects the Nigerian educational system to be a most important means of societal change from an agrarian culture to an industrialized culture (National Policy on Education, 1998). But the change agent (the school), in pursuing the policy seems to lay more emphasis on the scientific and technological revision of our culture and less emphasis on the moral axiological aspects of the culture. This is particularly so at the higher levels of our education. But this is only in agreement with the National Policy on Education 1998 e.g. see p. 20. Thus the Nigerian educational policy and practice need to consider the pursuit of science and technological programmes as well as that of moral programmes with equal magnitude. This is because much as reconstructionism does not advocate the education of the child in morals alone (whereby producing the 'cultured' gentleman who lacks vocational competence) it does not similarly advocate the education of a technocrat with little moral qualms.

A Critique of the Manifestations of Cultural Reconstructionism in the Nigerian Educational system:

The foregoing shows that Nigerian educational policy aspires to transmit our cultural heritage as well as restructure the social order in the light of changing needs of modern technological and industrialized life. The educational policy also aspires to promote social cohesion (a democratic principle). (National Policy on Education 1998 pp. 7 – 9; Crittenden 1973; Brubacher, 1962).

In reality however, the 6-3-3-4 system of education promotes the development of the society in vocational, scientific and technological realms more than it does in moral and other axiological realms. This is evident in the fact that vocational, scientific and technological subjects receive more emphasis in the curriculum of Secondary education than moral lessons, which are not so emphasised at the Secondary School level. Instead, moral lessons constitute only non-examinable subject. This is to say that in reality Nigerian education strives to restructure the social order in the light of changing technological needs of modern industrialized life without giving equal emphasis to the moral dimensions that are similarly real to our life conditions. Thus the educational system in its attempt to solve a social problem creates another. The cultural reconstructionists however maintain that one of the main causes of cultural crises (e.g. wars, environmental pollution, and widening of gap between rich and poor) is the fact that our scientific developments are not connected to the moral, religious and other axiological realities of our lives. And this is why people make inhumane use of scientific discoveries with the tendency that such use even makes the human race to stand the risk of self annihilation. For instance, therefore our education system in its bid to ensure social reconstruction, should also ensure that our traditional moral values of brotherhood and character training receive adequate attention.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been found that Nigerian education favours cultural reconstructionism, but in its pursuance of the educational philosophy, the educational system places greater emphasis on scientific and technological development than on moral development. This lopsided emphasis goes against the principles behind cultural reconstructionism, for the cultural crises that give rise to cultural reconstructionism partly derive from the exigency wherein people

make inhumane use of our scientific and technological devices. This is a moral affair and therefore moral development needs to be pursued with the same vigour as that of scientific and technological development in our educational system. In effect the Nigerian educational system should step-up its emphasis on moral education such that cultural crises manifested in environmental pollution, wars, and threats of wars, and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor may be minimized.

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