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Social Reconstructionism and Education

Social Reconstructionism sharply contrasts with the conservative Essentialist and Perennialist theories, which Reconstructionists regard to be reflective theories that mirror inherited social patterns and values. Reconstructionists assert that educators should originate policies and programs to reform society. Teachers, they say, should use their power to lead the young in programs of social engineering and reform.

Social Reconstructionists claim to follow John Dewey's Pragmatism, which emphasized the need to reconstruct both personal and social experience. Seizing on Dewey's emphasis on reconstructing experience, Reconstructionists stress the reconstruction of social experience and the culture.¹

Although Social Reconstructionists differ on particulars, they agree on premises such as the following: (1) all philosophies, ideologies, and theories, including educational ones, are culturally based and emerge from specific cultural patterns that are conditioned by living at a given time and in a particular place; (2) culture, as a dynamic process, is growing and changing; and (3) human beings can refashion culture so that it promotes human growth and development.²

Rather than being abstract or based on speculative philosophy, educational theories, Reconstructionists contend, should shape social and political policies. Reconstructionists are suspicious of universalist or cosmic theories of education that emphasize highly abstract categories of unchanging reality, human nature, truth, and value. This suspicion can be traced to their Pragmatist origins and their rejection of the dualism found in Realism and Thomism and the educational theories derived from them, Perennialism and Essentialism.

Social Reconstructionists view contemporary society as facing a severe crisis resulting from humankind's unwillingness to reconstruct institutions and values to meet the needs of modern life. Human beings entered the modern technological and scientific era with attitudes and values derived from the rural, preindustrial past. To resolve the crisis, human beings need to examine their heritage and identify the viable elements that will help to resolve the present crisis. If people examine their heritage, deliberately plan the direction of change, and implement the plan, they can create a new social order. The school's task is to examine the cultural heritage critically and to emphasize the elements that can be used in the needed reconstruction of society. In the sections that follow, we examine cultural crisis and reconstruction; the pioneering work of George S. Counts; development theory and futurism; and issue-oriented schools; and consider Reconstructionism in its philosophical and ideological relationships.

CULTURAL CRISIS

Reconstructionism asserts that modern society is experiencing a profound crisis caused by an unwillingness to engage in fundamental cultural reconstruction. The symptoms of cultural crisis are many. There are great variations in economic levels of life, both in the United States and throughout the world. While a few people enjoy wealth, the vast majority struggle at a subsistence level that borders on dire poverty. In the United States, large numbers of people, especially members of minority groups, have been victimized by decades of poverty and discrimination. Internationally, two-thirds of the world's population is barely surviving. The Reconstructionist regards the contradiction between wealth and poverty as a residue of the prescientific past.

The world is plagued by international tensions and war or the threat of war. In an age of potential nuclear destruction, military conflict with the threat of escalation into worldwide holocaust jeopardizes humankind's continued existence on this planet. Further, the Reconstructionists point to myriad unresolved conflicts and to the wastage of human potential. Such problems as overpopulation, environmental pollution, violence, and terrorism are symptoms of the pervasive crisis.

At the root of the crisis is the severing of human values from social and economic realities. The human creative genius has developed dynamic scientific and technological instruments that contribute to further change. At the same time that the dynamic forces of science and technology have changed the material environment, an inherited conception of an idealized past seeks to preserve the status quo. While Reconstructionists examine the past to find viable elements in the cultural heritage that can be used instrumentally, they disdain theories that urge us to go back to the "good old days." For them, the nostalgia for a problem-free past is often an ideological camouflage used by Neo-Conservatives to preserve the status quo.

Cultural Reconstruction

Reconstructionists believe that modern society and human survival are intimately related. To ensure human survival and to create a more humane civilization, human beings need to become social engineers who can plan the course of change and use science and technology to achieve desired goals. Hence, Reconstructionist education should cultivate (1) a critical examination of the cultural heritage, (2) a commitment to work for deliberate social reform, (3) a planning attitude capable of plotting the course of cultural revision, and (4) the testing of the cultural plan by enacting programs of deliberate social reform.

Reconstructionists believe that all social reform arises in existing life conditions. Students are expected to define the major problems facing humankind and to recognize the dynamic forces of the present. Students should be able to detect the customs, beliefs, and values that impede social reconstruction. Values that are merely customary should be reconstructed. The moral and ideological culture is permeated with residues of the prescientific and pretechnological age. Customary and stereotypical ways of thinking that lead to intolerance, discrimination, and superstition should be identified and discarded.

THE PIONEERING WORK OF GEORGE S. COUNTS

A clear statement of the need for educators to resolve social problems was made by George S. Counts in his book *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* George S. Counts (1889–1974) was an educator who stimulated Social Reconstructionist theory. Born in rural Kansas, Counts witnessed the geographical closing of the American frontier and believed that new frontiers needed to be forged in human ideas and social institutions. Counts, who earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1916, applied social theory to educational issues. During his active life, Counts was a professor of education at Columbia University's Teachers College, a president of the American Federation of Teachers, a leader of New York's Liberal Party, and a determined advocate of civil liberties. He was also a distinguished comparative educator who developed pioneering insights into Soviet society and education. Although Counts was on the radical cutting edge of social change in the United States, he became a determined anti-Communist. He early detected the totalitarianism inherent in Stalinism in the Soviet Union.³

Although Counts did not formally identify with those who called themselves Social Reconstructionists, an analysis of his educational theory clarifies themes of central concern for Reconstructionist educators. Counts's still unanswered question—"Dare the school build a new social order?"—created a ferment that continues today.



A photograph of George S. Counts (1889–1974), author of *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* and a leading Reconstructionist theorist.

For Counts, the great crises of the twentieth century were symptoms of profound transition and rapid change. Acute cultural change occurred as U.S. society moved between two very different social patterns. The older, agrarian, rural, neighborhood community had been displaced by a rapid rush into a mode of life that was highly complex, industrialized, scientific, and technological. From a loose aggregation of rural households and neighborhoods, the nation, under the impetus of technological change, became a mass society characterized by minute structural and functional differentiation. While these rapid changes appeared to be primarily material, the social, moral, political, economic, religious, and aesthetic aspects of life were also affected.

Change itself did not necessarily provoke crisis. Rather, crisis occurred when individuals were unprepared to cope with and order the processes of change. Counts believed that educational systems had failed to equip people, both cognitively and attitudinally, to deal with pervasive social and cultural changes. The crisis was further aggravated because change occurred multilaterally. That is, alterations in one area accelerated changes and compounded crises in other areas

of life. Because of people's unwillingness to reconstruct society, turmoil and maladjustment characterized the current period of profound change.

Counts's analysis used the cultural-lag theory, which asserted that a lag occurred when human technological inventiveness outdistanced moral consciousness and social organization. An institutional crisis resulted from a whole series of maladjustments between inherited attitudes and values on the one hand, and technological innovations on the other.

One of the most serious dislocations was in the economy, where inherited values of rugged individualism impeded the establishing of a planning, cooperating, and coordinating social order. The Reconstructionist distinguished between a *planning* society and a *planned* society. In a planning society, the social design was never really completed but was continually refashioned by human creative intelligence. In contrast, a planned society, which followed a master blueprint for social change, was often locked into a predetermined mold which prevented innovative reconstruction of the plan. Thus, it was more important to use planning as a process than to arrive at a desired social destination.

To Counts, the crucial problem was to formulate a theory of education to prepare people to resolve social crises by reconstructing ideas, beliefs, and values in the light of changing conditions. In *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* Counts challenged educators to create an educational system that recognized the emergence of a world society.⁴

U.S. education's task was twofold: (1) reconstruction of the theoretical foundations based on the U.S. cultural heritage, and (2) the experimental development of school programs that could deal with problems of acute cultural crisis and social disintegration.

Because education was always relative to a given society, U.S. education was a product of its unique heritage. For U.S. education to serve broad social needs, these needs had to be examined in terms of the cultural heritage. Then, the heritage could be reconstructed in view of social problems. In his book *The Social Foundations of Education* (1934), Counts argued that "education is always a function of time, place, and circumstances" that reflects "the hopes, fears, and aspirations of a particular time in history."⁵

Counts reasoned that a viable conception of the U.S. cultural heritage rested on two necessary conditions: (1) affirmation of the values in the democratic tradition, and (2) recognition of the dominant contemporary reality—the emergence of a technological civilization. On these two conditions, U.S. educators could create an educational theory that encouraged fundamental social reconstruction. Based on a concept of cooperative behavior in an essentially cooperative society, a synthesis of the viable elements of the democratic heritage and the requirements of science would harness scientific and technological powers for democratic purposes. The reconstruction of a comprehensive educational theory encompassed the entire range of human activities. Labor, income, property, leisure, recreation, sex, family, government, public opinion, race, ethnicity, war, peace, art, and aesthetics were appropriate to educational reconstruction.

When he challenged educators to fashion a cultural philosophy of education for modern American life, Counts was also urging them to assume the responsibilities of "educational statesmanship." Counts defined an educational statesman as a leader, a proponent of vital ways and means, a person of ideas, and an initiator of broad policy. For too long, teacher education had concentrated on mechanics and had neglected major social and economic problems. In formulating educational philosophies and programs, the educational leader was to provide national direction.

Counts's conception of the democratic ethic was uniquely associated with the U.S. experience and exalted the frontier and the popular democracy associated with Andrew Jackson, the Progressivism of Woodrow Wilson, the Liberalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the attempts to create a planning society as found in the New Freedom, the New Deal, the Experimentalism of John Dewey, and the historical relativism and economic interpretations of Charles Beard.⁶ In emphasizing the Progressive-Liberal strand of U.S. tradition, Counts rejected the more conservative Hamiltonianism, Social Darwinism, economic individualism, and rugged competitive capitalism. U.S. democracy was not only a political expression but was and should continue to be a product of the economic, social, moral, and aesthetic forces operating within the heritage. Democracy rested on an egalitarian social base and had to penetrate all areas of life. Inequalities of opportunity caused by wealth, race, color, or religion were subversive to the democratic ethic.

The Importance of Technology

A reconstructed program of U.S. education was directly related to a technological civilization. The application of science to the modes and techniques of life had created a new cultural force—technology—which was "the art of applying science and mechanics to the various departments of human economy." A practical and purposeful instrument, technology was marked by an emphasis on precise, orderly, and defined relationships. While its experimental character concerned the practical application of knowledge, technology was not limited to material processes and products. It was also a process, a method of solving problems and of viewing the world.

Because technology applies science to life, the role of science in a reconstructed educational philosophy should be examined. Counts saw science as humanity's most accurate instrument and method of problem solving. As a method of intelligence, science produced ordered and precise knowledge. Terming science "a method of organized and critical common sense," Counts described this method in the following manner: (1) the scientific method begins with an hypothesis growing out of previous experience, knowledge, and thought; (2) the hypothesis is tested by a process of accurate and adequate observation employing the most precise instruments; (3) data are compiled and the hypothesis proved or rejected on the basis of empirical and public verification.⁷

In commenting on science as a cultural instrument, Counts examined the characteristics of technology—the application of science to the modes and techniques of life. Technology was rational, functional, planful, dynamic, and efficient. Technological rationality rested on its freedom from tradition. Embracing immediately relevant ideas and methods that served human purposes, technology observed, inquired, and accurately and mathematically described. As quantitative reasoning tested the outcomes of technology and predicted their consequences, humanity's freedom of action increased. As it came to occupy larger areas of life, the inherent rationality of science would penetrate into society.

Because it was functional rather than purely abstract, technology was basically utilitarian. And because it was capable of being planned, technology required carefully formulated purposes, determination of directions, and conception of projected actions prior to their undertaking. The technological mode opposed impulse and caprice. The technological age required a planning and cooperating society.

Technology was dynamic. One invention or discovery initiated an ever-greater, unending cluster of new inventions. The acceleration of change initiated by inventions and discoveries was not solely material but quickly spread into the nonmaterial culture and caused subsequent economic, political, moral, and social alterations. The dynamic character of technology had accelerated social change.

Efficiency was technology's most pervasive characteristic. Technological processes achieved the greatest possible end with the least expenditure of waste and energy. Originating in the machine, the ideal of efficiency extended first to economic production and then to the entire society. Technology placed a premium on professional competence. For without the expert knowledge of the specialist, the entire productive mechanism might fall into disorder. As technology advanced, inexpert opinion yielded to trained intelligence.

Technology placed great power in human hands. Like science, it was a neutral instrument that could serve humane and enriching purposes or be an instrument of ruthless exploitation. In a nuclear age, it could be an instrument of liberation or of destruction. This powerful instrument was not a mere additive to civilization; rather, it was a system of relationships that continually altered social patterns. The technological age required continual reconstructions of the economy, society, education, government, and morality.⁸

Counts's examination of U.S. civilization affirmed two essential strains: a basic egalitarian democratic ethic, and the emergence of a scientific-industrial-technological society. These two strains were elements in a reconstructive synthesis that became the basis of his "civilizational" philosophy for U.S. education. Rather than prescribe the design of the emergent society, Counts preferred open-ended and experimental social engineering. The American people would shape their own destiny, using their own elastic democratic temperament. Counts wrote that the course of U.S. democracy depended on the ability of the people

*to learn from experience, to define the problem, to formulate a program of action, to discover, appraise, and marshal the apparent and latent, the actual and potential resources of American democracy.*⁹

The School and Cultural Reconstruction

In formulating a viable educational philosophy, the Reconstructionist educator gave careful attention to the school as a cultural agency. However, caution was exercised so that the school's potentiality as an instrument of reconstruction was not exaggerated. It was necessary to distinguish between education and schooling. More informal education referred to the total process of enculturation. The school as a specialized social agency was established to bring children into group life through the deliberate cultivation of socially preferred skills, knowledge, and values.

Counts believed that Americans had not sufficiently recognized the differences between education and schooling. They had identified the school with progress and regarded schooling as an unflinching solution to all problems.

However, world crises had multiplied during the period of the greatest expansion of schooling. Instead of directing social change, the school was driven aimlessly by external forces. The immature American faith in the power of schooling was based on a concept of education as a pure and independent entity isolated from social, political, and economic conflicts. This uncritical attitude inhibited the serious examination of education's moral and social foundations. Although Americans associated education solely with democracy, history demonstrated that an appropriate education existed for every society or civilization. In the twentieth century, the totalitarians proved extremely adept at using education to promote their particular ideologies. German education under the Nazis and Soviet education under the Communists demonstrated that the school could serve many masters.

Some educators, including many Progressives, erroneously believed that the school was capable of reconstructing society without the support of other social institutions. Because the school was only one of several educative social institutions, educators had to be constantly aware of the changing functions and structures of the society that determined its task. An educational theory based solely on schooling lacked reality and vitality.¹⁰ Counts believed that the school, while important, was only one of many cultural agencies. When he asked educators to "build a new social order," Counts was urging educators to examine the culture and ally with those social forces and groups that exemplified the democratic ethic in technological use. Although educators could not reform society without the support of others, "educational statesmen" could provide leadership in building a new society. While a limited type of educational origination, it differed from the reflective theory, which held that the school should merely mirror society. Mere reflection meant that powerful pressure groups could dominate the school for their own special interests. Counts's educational theory also opposed the "four walls philosophy of the school," which asserts that educators should be concerned only with schooling and should ignore social issues.

In outlining a democratic educational program, Counts emphasized two major objectives: (1) the development of democratic habits, dispositions, and

loyalties; and (2) the acquisition of knowledge and insight for intelligent participation in democratic society. Public education was to develop a feeling of competency and adequacy in the individual; an allegiance to human equality; brotherhood, dignity, and worth; loyalty to the democratic methodology of discussion, criticism, and decision; a mentality characterized by integrity and scientific spirit; and respect for talent, training, and character.¹¹

Counts attacked the doctrines of educational impartiality and neutrality that demanded the teacher's complete objectivity. All education is committed to certain beliefs and values. Some criteria are necessary to guide the selection or rejection of educational goals, purposes, subjects, materials, and methods. At no point can the school assume complete neutrality and at the same time be a concrete functioning reality. For every society, there was an appropriate, distinctive education. The primary obligation of U.S. educators was to clarify the underlying assumptions and guiding principles that gave commitment and direction to the school.

As each new generation was brought into social participation, it mastered society's skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Without this transmission and perpetuation, the particular society perished. The release of human energy occurred, not by freeing individuals from tradition, but by introducing them to a vital and growing tradition.

Counts challenged both the more traditional Essentialists and Perennialists and the child-centered Progressives. Traditionalists, like the Perennialists, stressed education as purely intellectual and universal rather than involved in solving social problems. For them, the school should cultivate intellectual skills, knowledge, and habits. In the pursuit of pure knowledge, teachers were not to become involved in economic, political, and social controversies.

In addition to opposing educational traditionalism, Counts challenged child-centered Progressives. He attacked the notions of some Progressives who believed it possible to have a completely neutral school in which children were never imposed on but were totally free to develop according to their own interests. Counts held that only as social participants could children grow through their experiences. As a cultural participant, the child was imposed on by the culture and in turn made an imprint on the culture.

DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND FUTURISM

Two contemporary movements that bear a relationship to Reconstructionism are Development theory and Futurism. Development theorists and Futurists are concerned with creating a new world order.

Contemporary Development educators are concerned with bringing about worldwide change. They are especially concerned with "empowering" the economically impoverished and often politically suppressed peoples of the developing third-world nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Unlike the Devel-

opment theories of the 1960s that emphasized modernization from the top down by centralized government agencies, grassroots Development educators stress initiatives, planning, and implementation by people at the local level.¹²

Still another approach to using education to create a new social order comes from Futurists, educational theorists who attempt to predict the course of social and technological change and to educate for it. Their goal is not only to reduce the lag between technological change and social adaptation to it, but also to provide human beings with the knowledge and methods to control and to direct change. Futurists, such as Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock*, maintain that the school curriculum not only lags behind social and technological change but is also anachronistic in that it is geared to an era that has already passed.¹³ While Counts argued that schools in the industrial era were still educating as if they existed in an essentially rural and agricultural society, Futurists find schools educating for the industrial rather than the postindustrial needs of the so-called information society.¹⁴

ISSUE-ORIENTED SCHOOLS

As noted, Social Reconstructionist educators see the schools as centers in which teachers and students grapple with society's pressing issues, not merely for academic inquiry but to engage in action-oriented research and solution. In such inquiry-oriented schools, the focus is on large social, political, economic, and educational issues. The Social Reconstructionist seeks to (1) locate schools in a social, or societal, context; (2) use schools as instruments or agencies of directed social change and reform; and (3) identify society's current social, political, economic, and educational problems. Because of their action-oriented position, the Reconstructionists encounter opposition from Perennialists, Essentialists, and even some Progressives, who fear that the schools would become politicized. These critics contend that, if applied, Social Reconstructionism would lead to the indoctrination of students for particular political purposes.

Countering the objections of their educational opponents, Social Reconstructionists contend that contemporary U.S. schools are immersed in profound social issues that daily impact their educational mission, activities, and performance. Problems such as poverty, racism, sexism, homelessness, drug abuse, and violence are social pathologies of endemic proportions in the United States. The Social Reconstructionists argue that schools cannot ignore these problems. Not only do they have an impact on society, politics, and the economy, but they also profoundly affect schools, students, and teachers. Further, these profound problems have even shaped the relationship between the school and society. For example, if students are victims of poverty, sexism, and racism, if they are hungry, and if they attend schools in a state of anxiety due to the fear of violence, then their attitudes, dispositions, and expectations about schooling will be neg-

atively impacted. If teachers, too, feel the impact of these debilitating conditions either directly or through the lives of their students, then teaching and learning—the heart of schooling, will be affected as well. In other words, social issues outside of the school are part of the context that shape what goes on in schools.

The Social Reconstructionist's issues-oriented school is based on a belief that a definite intersection exists between the school and society. The larger society's unresolved tensions and strains have an impact on schools, teachers, and students. For Reconstructionist educators, social issues, rather than an exclusive emphasis on academic subjects and skills, constitute the underlying base of the curriculum and the educational experiences that derive from it. The school becomes a societal laboratory in which students, by engaging in action-oriented problem solving, become self-empowered agents of directed social change. From such a perspective, curriculum construction is continuous rather than a process that can reach completion. Unlike the Perennialist who envisions a curriculum of eternal verities that remains unchanged in its key features, the Reconstructionist sees the curriculum as being continually reconstructed in terms of society's changing socioeconomic and political needs.

Educators who follow the Social Reconstructionist theory would see social issues problematically. For them, information about an issue is important in the research phase. However, the problem would need to be acted on and resolved by students and teachers in an active mode of learning.

In a problem-centered and action-oriented approach to major social issues, the Social Reconstructionist would ask the following focusing questions: (1) What are the viable elements in the culture and what are the areas of knowledge that explain these elements? (2) What are the problematic areas—the issues—that are impacting the society? (3) How can the problem areas be resolved so that the solutions become part of a reconstructed culture and society?

A social issue, or problem, that affects society and schooling can be analyzed in two dimensions: societally (structurally) and personally. A problem such as drug abuse may exist at the national, in some cases international, level and be found to be affecting social, political, economic, and educational institutions and infrastructures. Living in a society that exhibits major strains produces personal dissonance as well. At the local school level, drug-addicted students not only suffer the consequences of addiction but also exert a negative impact on the school, teachers, and other students. In analyzing a major social issue such as drug abuse, it becomes evident that what we consider to be a national issue, while perhaps more acute in the United States, is an international or global issue as well that affects the societies and people of other countries. While drug abuse is used as an example of a major issue, other national—and perhaps global—problems are poverty, racism, sexism, homelessness, terrorism, and violence.

Reconstructionists argue that educators—administrators and teachers alike—need to be knowledgeable about the social context in which schooling occurs. This knowledge will aid them to first understand the social situation and then to develop strategies for its reconstruction.

RECONSTRUCTIONISM'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social Reconstructionism has been influenced by Pragmatism, especially John Dewey's Experimentalism. Reconstructionists believe that by using the insights of the social sciences and the scientific method, they can create a new society. Whereas Pragmatism is open-ended, Reconstructionism tends to offer a version of the new society. Critics of the theory argue that the Reconstructionist preconceptions interfere with experimental inquiry and could lead to indoctrination in the schools.

In terms of ideology, Reconstructionists have been influenced by Liberalism, especially its modern variety, and Utopianism. Modern Liberalism, with its predilection for social reform through government regulation and intervention, is compatible with the Reconstructionist emphasis on social engineering and planning. However, the Reconstructionist proposals for a new society based on comprehensive social planning exceed the Liberal orientation to incremental reform and change.

In their desire for comprehensive social change and planning, the Reconstructionists have been influenced by the grand designs of the Utopian theorists. Although Reconstructionists have a vision of the new society, they do not regard themselves as visionaries.

Social Reconstructionists have some interesting relationships to Progressives. In fact, the socially oriented wing of the Progressive education movement was the base from which Reconstructionism emerged. George Counts and other socially oriented Progressives charged that child-centered Progressives were ignoring significant social issues and problems. For the Reconstructionists, a truly Progressive theory of education needed to examine the nature of social crisis and resolve the problems that aggravated that crisis. Child-centered Progressives countered that the Social Reconstructionists were politicizing schools and attempting to indoctrinate children according to their particular ideological creed.

Many parallels exist between Social Reconstructionism and Critical Theory, which is examined in the following chapter. Both theories agree that schools should be used to develop students' critical consciousness and ability to analyze social problems. They concur on the need to achieve a more equitable distribution of economic goods and services and to eliminate discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. However, the historical origins of the two theories are different. Social Reconstructionism arose from the Pragmatic and Progressive temper for social, economic, and political reform. In many respects, its economic analysis was informed by Charles A. Beard's historical interpretations and George Counts's educational analyses. While economic forces certainly condition politics, society, and schooling in Reconstructionist analysis, these institutions and agencies are not completely economically determined. Although schools as institutions might be controlled by favored economic classes, schooling, even in a capitalist society, as an educational process still has liberating possibilities.

Because of its emphasis on the school as an agency of social change and social engineering, Reconstructionism is opposed by the traditional philosophies of Idealism, Realism, and Thomism, which construe education in intellectual terms. It also draws the opposition of Conservatives, Essentialists, and Perennialists, who claim that it negates the power of tradition, promotes social instability, and neglects the cultivation of essential skills and subjects. Reconstructionists, they contend, would use schools to test their social theories and turn children into sociological and pedagogical guinea pigs.

CONCLUSION

Social Reconstructionism is a theory that seeks to use the school to create a new society. A primary function of schools is to aid in the diagnosis of the crisis of modern society. Schools are to identify the major social problems that contribute to the cultural crisis and are to create the skills and attitudes that will resolve these problems. For Social Reconstructionists, teachers should not fear a commitment to building a new society. Discounting charges of indoctrination, they claim that all education is a product of a particular culture. Originating with the socially oriented wing of Progressive education, Reconstructionism continues in various contemporary forms such as Development education and Futurism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify and analyze the symptoms of cultural crisis. Can and should schools seek to resolve these issues?
2. Critique Social Reconstructionism from the perspectives of Essentialism, Perennialism, and Progressivism.
3. Compare and contrast the Conservative and the Social Reconstructionist conceptions of tradition.
4. How would a Marxist critique Social Reconstructionism?
5. Indicate the ways in which Social Reconstructionism resembles ideology.
6. To what extent is Social Reconstructionism a conflict theory?
7. Examine the dynamic impact of technology on society. Use the computer, television, or the automobile as case studies.
8. Critique Counts's statement that "education is always a function of time, place, and circumstances" from the perspective of a Perennialist such as Hutchins or Adler.
9. Describe the kind of teacher that would be needed in a Reconstructionist issue-oriented school.
10. Identify the kinds of social, economic, and political problems in contemporary society that Reconstructionists would use in an issues-oriented curriculum.

INQUIRY PROJECTS

- In a paper, identify and analyze the areas of social and economic disparity and tension in the United States.
- Prepare a map that identifies areas of conflict in the world.
- Using statistics from the United Nations or the World Bank, estimate the number of people on the earth who suffer from malnutrition and extreme poverty.
- Do a content analysis of selected social studies textbooks used in secondary schools. Identify the socioeconomic problems that these books discuss. Do the authors suggest solutions to these problems?
- Review a book by George S. Counts, Theodore Brameld, William O. Stanley, or another Reconstructionist educator.
- Review a book by Alvin Toffler or another Futurist author, with special reference to education and schooling.
- Develop a unit for classroom instruction that follows the Reconstructionist approach.
- Arrange a debate on the following resolution: Resolved, the public schools will adopt a Social Reconstructionist orientation.

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ENDNOTES

1. For the history of Social Reconstructionism, see Michael E. James, *Social Reconstructionism Through Education: The Philosophy, History and Curricula of a Radical Ideal* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1995).
2. Significant examples of Social Reconstructionism can be found in Theodore Brameld, *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956); and William O. Stanley, *Education and Social Integration* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1953).
3. Counts's realization of the totalitarian nature of Soviet Communism can be found in George S. Counts, *The Challenge of Soviet Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957).
4. George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York: John Day, 1932), pp. 17–18.
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6. Lawrence J. Dennis, *George S. Counts and Charles A. Beard: Collaborators for Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).
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