

THE INFLUENCE OF JOHN DEWEY'S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT ON PHILIPPINE EDUCATION

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Abstract. This paper discusses the influence of John Dewey's educational thoughts on Philippine Education in the past and in the present. It also elaborates the manifestations of the Deweyan vision of a democratic and progressive education in the Philippines.

Keywords: Philippines, education, John Dewey, progressive education

John Dewey is considered to be the most influential theorist of the progressive education movement. His pragmatist, constructivist and democratic ideas and views exerted great influence on the world of education. Many concepts and ideas used by progressive educators and outcome-based practitioners such as problem-solving skills, "learning by doing", critical thinking skills and life-long learning are Deweyan influences. Dewey argues in his writings that learning and education are interactive and social processes. The school, therefore, ought to be a social institution where social reform can take place. His vision of a school as a democracy in microcosm dedicated to ad-

addressing social inequalities still resonates through progressive educators of the present era. He has visited many nations during his lifetime and his legacy goes on and on around the globe.

Philippine education was shaped by the hands of Spain, then of the United States, and eventually of the Republic itself. As the nation pushes itself forward towards a progressive future, it would not be surprising if some of Dewey's educational thoughts have always manifested (or begin to manifest) in the country's educational evolution. Let us discuss the manifestations of his educational thoughts in Philippine education.

Development of education in the Philippines

Education in the Philippines has undergone several stages of development from the pre-colonial period up to the present. During the pre-colonial period, children were provided more vocational training and less academics by parents and tribal tutors. Education was unstructured and informal. Filipinos of Malay stock used to carry out 'a basic form of education in which children were taught reading, religion and self-defense' (Canieso-Doronila, 1996).

In 1565, the Spanish established a colony which led to the replacement of these tribal tutors by Spanish missionaries. Education, especially in the early years of Spanish colonization, was religion-oriented and for the elite. However, a few decades away before the Spanish-American war, the Spanish government decided to set up free primary instruction regardless of race and gender. This decision was due to the colony's growing rebellion and growing commercial agricultural export economy. On top of this, the teaching of the Spanish language was made compulsory.

At the turn of the 20th century, the American colonial period began, marking the period of further organization and orientation of Philippine education, with English as the new language of instruction. The curricula of in-

struction of the public schools were based on the American pattern and, in the main, with American books (Orata, 1956). The high centralization of the public school system resulted to a heavy shortage of teachers. As a response to this, the American government sent more than one thousand teachers to the colony.

Less than a decade before the Second World War, commonwealth government was established in the Philippines. This marked the period of re-adjustment and reorientation in the Philippine educational system. Educational plans and policies were reoriented to conform to the requirements of the new Constitution. According to the provisions of the Constitution of the Philippines (1935), all schools shall “aim to develop moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, vocational efficiency and to teach the duties of citizenship”.¹⁾

On July 4, 1946 the Philippines was declared independent from the US. The era of the Third Philippine Republic was marked by a rapid expansion of private schools, particularly on the secondary and higher levels, and a rapid increase in enrolment rate. It may be summarized that after a few decades under American rule, Philippine education evolved into a more accessible and democratic system. Its evolution went on further on its own after the declaration of independence.

John Dewey and Philippine education

During the American colonization of the Philippines, John Dewey’s progressive education movement was a sensation in the United States and in some other countries. His progressive ideas, however, did not reflect in the Philippine industrial education of that time. Industrial education refers to the “manual training classes given in the lower grades and vocational training provided in the higher grades” (May, 2009). From 1909 to 1930, industrial

education was prioritized by American education policy makers in the Philippines. Pupils were taught handicrafts and farming techniques for earning. It was, therefore, not in line with John Dewey's educational thoughts unlike in some schools in the US of that time. For instance, in the US, pupils worked in school gardens because educators felt that gardening complemented curriculum units in "nature study" and hence could contribute to the individual's intellectual and social development (Dewey & Dewey, 1915). On the other hand, in colonial Philippines, the emphasis was on the strictly economic function of industrial education.

John Dewey's influence on Philippine education started to get sharply visible when it became independent. Student governments and students councils became extended widely as a mode of school discipline. In 1957, as a breakaway group from the Student Council Association of the Philippines (SCAP), the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP) was established. It is a nationwide alliance of student governments committed to the advancement of students' democratic rights and welfare. John Dewey pointed out how important the presence and engagement of student voice are to the educational process. In his book *Democracy and Education*, he talked about the necessity of engaging student experience and perspectives in the curriculum of schools. He stated that the essence of the demand for freedom is the need of conditions which will "enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group interest" as well as to "partake of its activities in such ways that social guidance shall be a matter of his own mental attitude, and not a mere authoritative dictation of his acts" (Dewey, 1916). "Student governments" or "student councils" would satisfy the need of such conditions by serving to engage students in learning about leadership and democracy.

Up to the present, every public and private elementary and secondary school in the Philippines has always had to have its own student government.

Every private and state colleges and universities has its own student councils. The student council has a student regent and the student regent represents students of the whole university.

John Dewey and Philippine educational reform

The K to 12 Basic Education Program is a major education reform implemented in 2012 in the Philippines. It serves as a response to the urgent need to improve the quality of Philippine basic education. The K-12 program aims at ‘decongesting and enhancing the basic education curriculum for learners to master basic competencies, lengthening the cycle of basic education to cover kindergarten through year 12’.²⁾

K-12 stands for universal kindergarten, six (6) years of elementary and six (6) years of secondary education – all compulsory. Prior to the implementation of K-12 program in 2012, basic education in the Philippines only had four (4) years of secondary education.

On top of the lengthening of the basic education cycle, the curricula of the subjects in this new program differ from those of the old one. The K to 12 Basic Education Program embodies an educational reform influenced by John Dewey’s educational thoughts – both direct and indirect influences. John Dewey’s influence on the present Philippine education seems to be more on curricular innovations.

The following learning approaches reflect John Dewey’s pragmatist and cognitive constructivist ideas. They are incorporated in the K to 12 Program:

Inquiry-based learning

As a whole, the Philippine K to 12 science curriculum is learner-centered and inquiry-based, emphasizing the use of evidence in constructing

explanations. Inquiry-based learning is based on John Dewey's philosophy that education begins with the curiosity of the learner (Dewey, 1910). The spiral path of inquiry begins with asking questions, leading to investigation of solutions, resulting to the creation of new knowledge as information is gathered, followed by discussion of discoveries and experiences and wrapped up by reflection on the new found knowledge. Each step in this process naturally leads to the next. Unlike in the old curriculum where learning tended to be more focused on fragmented and disintegrated content, K to 12 curriculum fosters the development of critical thinking, creative thinking, problem solving, team-work and informational literacy.

Spiral approach

[L]earning should not only take us somewhere; it should allow us later to go further more easily (Bruner, 1977).

The K-12 curriculum follows the spiral approach. Jerome Bruner is the proponent of this approach with principles derived from John Dewey. In the book *The Process of Education*, Bruner argues that curriculum should be designed in a way that it pursues a spiral progression that starts from simple to complex and requires revisiting prior knowledge (Bruner, 1977). In short words, students continuously build upon what they already know. From a cognitive constructivist's point of view, learners construct new ideas based upon their previously learned knowledge. Gradual mastery of the desired competencies is achieved through revisiting core ideas in several passes and relating new knowledge or skills with the previous. Therefore, unlike the old curriculum where so much knowledge was expected to be learnt within a limited period, the K to 12 curricula on the other hand is decongested and seamless. It has its focus on understanding for mastery and it ensures smooth tran-

sition between grade levels and continuum of competencies through spiral progression.

Conclusion

Indeed, both the present Philippine education and that of the past were influenced by John Dewey's educational thoughts. However, the degree and kind of influences differ.

Under the American rule, the innovations in Philippine education were more focused on the aspect of democracy as a preparation for independence. In the question of industrial education, Dewey's progressive ideas failed to reflect in Philippine education during the American colonization period. Back then, the emphasis of industrial education in the Philippines was only placed on its strictly economic function. The 'learning by doing' that Dewey had always preached about was just left at 'earning by doing'. Dewey's idea about 'small democracies', however, started to manifest when the Third Philippine Republic was established. Student governments and students councils began to flourish not only as student bodies in their respective institutions but also as a national union.

In the present, the implementation of the K to 12 program in 2012 serves as a response to the nation's necessity with regards to quality education. The incorporation of the Spiral Approach and Inquiry-Based Approach in the new curriculum shows that John Dewey's influence on the present Philippine education seems to be more on curricular innovations. It can therefore be concluded that the Deweyan influence on Philippine education in the past was more about the school being a "democracy in microcosm" and the important role of student voice to the educational process. On the other hand, his influence on the present Philippine education is more about his pragmatist and constructivist thoughts with regard to curriculum and learning.

Hopefully, these manifestations of Deweyan influences are signs of a more progressive future for Philippine education.

NOTES

1. <http://www.gov.ph/constitutions/the-1935-constitution/>
2. <http://www.gov.ph/downloads/2012/201209-K-to-12-Toolkit.pdf>

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