

Alfred North Whitehead's Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance to the Philippine Educational System

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Abstract: *The study exposes the central themes of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of education, namely; theory of value, theory of knowledge and wisdom, and theory of learning. This is premised on the idea that education is necessary for the development of human person's well-being specifically his social, physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. In his philosophy of education, Whitehead wanted to show how teachers, students, and even schools are stained by subtle misdirection of education in contemporary times. Hence, Whitehead has provided alternative approach, the rhythm of education that paves the way of a successful educational system. It is argued that education is necessary in every facets of human and societal development. Thus, for Whitehead, in achieving the aims of education, which is by having successfully attained the stages in the rhythm of education, there will be an emergence of a so-called perfect society.*

Keywords: Education, Alfred North Whitehead, Rhythm of Education, freedom, discipline

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to review Whitehead's aims of education specifically on his concepts of persons of culture and values and its relevance to the Philippine educational system. This is premised on the idea that Whitehead's concepts provide strong theoretical background, which has relevance in the contemporary educational system of the Philippines. In this doing so, the researchers will first discuss the current practices and issues of the educational system in the Philippines. This will show how teachers, students, and even schools are stained by subtle misdirection of education and traditional notion of education in today's time. Second, the researchers will discuss briefly Whitehead's theory/philosophy of education. This is an attempt to show that his theory is still necessary both for human's self-development and in addressing pressing issues of the country's present educational system. And lastly, the researchers will discuss Whitehead's rhythm of education, one of the salient features of his philosophy of education, and appropriate this concept in analyzing elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. Here, the researchers argue that Whitehead's concept of rhythm of education could be attained by re-evaluating and redevelopment of curriculum, by reviewing the delivery of instructions in each level or stage in educational system. Thus, paves the way of realizing that education possesses rhythms having freedom and discipline that is closely connected or linked in life – cycles in life.

1.1 Objectives of the study

- 1) Present Whitehead's philosophy of education.
- 2) Discuss the current issues and practices in the Philippine educational system.
- 3) Explore ways making Whitehead's philosophy of education as a guide in attaining the objectives of the Philippine education system.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Alfred North Whitehead's Philosophy of Education

Alfred North Whitehead is an English social and educational philosopher. In his work entitled *The Aims of Education*, he argued how traditional education has exhibited merely "pedantry" and routine in the history of education. For Whitehead, this traditional approach to education is overladen with "inert ideas." For Whitehead, this traditional approach in education weakens the vitality of lot of schools and universities, which provides empirical evidence that the current educational set up is unfaithful to its aims and true essence. For this reason, as for Whitehead, an educational system needs a review in order to provide alternative solution or new approach to education. Whitehead is convinced that by way of giving full review and re-evaluation of the current educational conditions that we will be able to achieve the aims of education to provide quality education that is beneficial for the development of every human person [1].

2.2 Several Issues Concerning the Philippine Educational System

In the present time, we have seen that in most cases, our approaches to education are not leading in the achievement of its aims, which in several instances, have resulted in our country's economic, social, and political dilemma. It is an obvious fact that job mismatch is one of the prevalent problems that could be attributed partly in the curriculum implementation in schools. Michael J. Handel, an economist, argues that job mismatch happens when in labor market the amount of labor force is either over or underqualified in relation to the skill levels of jobs offered by employers [2]. Job workers and seekers affected cannot find jobs that match their skill level. Likewise, workers are not well compensated vis-a-vis their educational qualifications and fields of specializations. Clearly, in this context, the educational degree of the employee is a bit useless.

Volume 7 Issue 7, July 2018

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Another problem that arises from the failure in educational process is the long history of unemployment. Unemployment is an occurrence that happens when an individual who is vigorously searching for an employment is unable to find work. It is frequently used as a step or measure of the health of the economy. According to Ben De Vera, a correspondent of Philippine Daily Inquirer, jobless rate inched up to 5.6 percent in July from 5.4 a year ago as more Filipino joined the labor force [3]. This is a concrete manifestation that the schools and its stakeholders have failed to foresee the quantity of skilled graduates vis-a-vis the actual need of the industry.

Lastly, it is necessary to take note the problem on deterioration of quality of education in the Philippines. According to Evelina Z. Almedeja, Head of Social Studies in Ramon Avanceña National Highschool in Iloilo, Philippines one factor that helps pull down the quality of our education is too much politics. Almedeja argued that every time there is a new government's item or position like heads of agencies are allotted to cronies or loyal friends even if they are not qualified to hold such positions. This case is not surprising. Even in other countries, it is also seen and experienced. However, the use of the word quality is quite relative. It is because when we say quality, it depends on whose criteria we are basing our judgment [4].

Again, education is necessary in the development of human person as well as the development of the society. The preceding discussions on the problems in our educational system are meant to show that aims of education, as envisioned by the academicians and curriculum makers, are not achieved. The failure of our educational system is stemmed on the lack of practical application of the different theories that are discussed in school. As a result, mismatch and high unemployment rates are prevalent in our contemporary society. Whitehead's philosophy now comes in.

Whitehead is giving another perspective of education in order to eliminate the fatal disconnection of subjects which destroys the vitality of our modern curriculum. He sees education as the study of life. According to him there is only one subject-matter for education, and that is life in all its manifestations [5]. Thus, the only way to become a person that can understand the world around him is to be a person who learned using life as the main force in education.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses the descriptive method of research, in particular, a simple text-based method of analysis on Whitehead's concept of education. After having reflected with all the necessary materials available, this study will also employ critical analysis in order to analyze the implications and relevance of Whitehead's philosophy in the attempt of addressing the issues in Philippine education.

4. Results and Discussions

In the next section, we will shortly discuss Whitehead's philosophy of education. This is an attempt to provide an

overview on how his concepts are relevant in assessing the Philippine educational system.

4.1 Whitehead's Aims of Education

We live each day with aims or goals. Aims give meaning or sense to life and direction. It is significant that an aim is framed, and determinations are put in to achieve that aim. Some of our aims become part of our day-to-day life in which we acknowledge or sometimes neglect. It is good if our aims are constructive, but if they are not then they will cause conflict in our life and in our relation to society where we belong. We failed to realize what our real aims are. When our journey towards life become miserable and we do not know which direction to go, then we are leading to an aimless pattern. Such is also the case in education. An aimless education is an education without the insurance that students achieve the desired learning and education outcomes.

Education for some educational theorists and philosophers should enable the individual to use the full potential of his mind, body and spirit. Education should develop the ability of an individual to make the best use of his personality and surroundings in order to actualize his potentialities. Through education, an individual could acquire and develop everything that life offers him. Thus, one goal of education is the cultivation and development of individuals.

Another goal of education is the improvement or betterment of the society. Since individuals constitute the society, the society would go with the improvement of individuals who make it up. So to speak, education has two goals: the development of an individual and the improvement of the society.

Moreover, what we should aim at producing are men who possess both culture and expert knowledge in some special direction [6]. He is interested in actively utilizing knowledge and skills that were taught to students. His aims of education contrast other educational theories that recommend mental training exclusively. His position is that, the ideas that are presented in the mind of the student cannot be separated from practice. Students should understand and realize the real application of the things they learn in school. Those things or ideas being taught to students should enhance not only their intellect but their self as well. For Whitehead, his aims of education tend to emphasize the fact that students have bodies which they bring to class with them. That is why whatever the students learn in school should equip them to become learned. Learn both in mind and behavior.

Thus, these aims should help people to realize and understand the true essence or notion of education, which is the study of life according to Whitehead. And will serve as an inspiration and a doorway for those who still cling to the traditional notion of education.

4.2 Rhythm of Education: It's Significance to the Philippine Educational System

Elementary education plays an essential duty in teaching students the fundamental of academic basics. According to

Batas PambansaBlg. 232 or the Education Act of 1982, it aims to provide knowledge and develop skills, attitudes, values essential to personal development. Moreover, education should provide learning experiences which increase the child's awareness of and responsiveness to the changes in the society. However, there are problems with educational systems that can block learning.

One of the problems is the learning method. In elementary education, teachers have their fixed approach or method in transferring knowledge to students. Teachers teach in a way that is useful and attracts to the number of his students. But, it is undeniable that students have their own unique style of learning and this method will not work efficiently. This fixed approach of learning that is being presented to the students will not always give them the joy or freedom to learn in a way that is comfortable to them.

In Whitehead's rhythm of education, this elementary level falls on his stage of romance where this stage is the start or doorway of a new or fresh learning experience and the basis for all learning. It is in this phase where excitement and wonder perform a leading and vital role, where the experience achieved through physical and sensory activities is in its complete form, where this stage of romance emphasizes on freedom to allow the child or the students to see for it and to act for it [7]. And so, it should be taken into serious account or manner in the child's self-development for it is his foundation on the next stage of his development, the secondary level. And in this stage, education should allow students to take their part in discoveries and let them sense like they are experiencing something fresh and new, arousing their interest and curiosity.

Moreover, in secondary level, it aims to continue promote the objectives of elementary education and discover and enhance the different aptitudes and interests of students in order to equip them with skills for productive endeavor and or to prepare them for tertiary schooling [8]. The secondary education also poses a problem on the inadequate number of abled and trained teachers. As we all know, our schools cannot function well if the teachers are not efficient and not adequate in number. Teachers' journey is often marked by attempts at using every available avenue to reach and teach their students [9]. In this context, teachers should be able to convey to the students what they are doing in school will not just be limited in school and within the duration of their learner's life; instead, they should be trained of the practicality of education. Education is not just an event in the school, but its utilization will go beyond the four corners of the classroom.

In his second stage, which is the stage of precision, is tantamount to this secondary level. The foundation provided by freedom for the period of romance fosters the development and growth of self-discipline mainly throughout the stage of precision. In this stage, the students begin to develop confidence, and the ability to form their own perspective and understanding [10]. They are able to realize how the knowledge they discovered freely during the stage of romance is important in their own life, for the enlightenment which comes from precise knowledge can now be understood and it corresponds to the obvious

requirements of common sense [11]. Thus, precision turns out to be a necessary and potentially valuable part of Whitehead's rhythm of education, but must continuously be considered within its limitations in order not to control and hinder the unlocked living of teaching and learning.

Lastly, the tertiary education aimed at educating the youth to become active and productive members of the society. Also, it seeks to meet and match industry demand with a competent and globally competitive workforce. Through a continuing effort to reach global education standards, our universities aim to increase the quality of human capital and productivity vis-à-vis national and economic progress. Further, it develops advance knowledge through research and applies them in improving the quality of human life and respond effectively of changing society [12]. However, there are several issues confronting tertiary education. One is the lack of overall vision, framework, and plan for higher education. Also, the mismatch between the training in schools and in actual jobs that causes the existence of the large number of unemployment result in a large disproportion in tertiary education.

The stage of generalization, which is Whitehead's third rhythmic education, is a return or revisit to romanticism with an increased advantage of classified ideas and relevant technique. It is the fruition which has been the goal of the precise training [13]. This stage of generalization depends on the two preceding stages of romance and precision to connect the possible with the actual individual's experience.

In the language of education, Whitehead finds the stage of generalization mainly at the level of university. He states that the spirit of generalization should dominate a University. The lectures should be addressed to the students/learners with details, and procedures that are familiar, at least in the sense of being congruous to pre-existing training as to be easily acquirable. The student at this stage should start from general ideas and study their applications to concrete cases, but these concrete cases should be studied as illustrating the scope of general ideas [14].

Hence, generalization permits understanding and realizing how every single experience is actually connected to the next and arouses an understanding of the strength or the power of beauty of the experiences. Beauty's concept gives value to the difficult background of combined factors or events that form individual's experience. Beauty, thus, defines the character or property of the experiences and directly the things that have experienced [15]. In this reason, beauty implies to the value of all learning and education experiences and relationships, involving the past and present, that enlighten the student's growth and development, helping to make their moral character stronger, and enriching their ability to live and exist well in relationship with others.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The various practices and issues discussed relating to the Philippine educational system prove that our education has not been able to achieve and meet the aims of education at

least in the perspective of Whitehead. Hence, this paper recommends for regular evaluation and redevelopment of the course offerings by the academicians and curriculum makers in order to fit the need of the society.

However, in fairness to the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED), they have worked hard in developing new programs and continue to update the academic curricula that ensures the employability of the students to industries, as manifested by the implementation of K to 12 program in the basic education and the continuous upgrading of delivery of instruction, professional development of teachers, and research initiatives in the higher education.

It should be clearly noted that in this paper, the researchers attempted to provide analysis of the country's educational system and its practices using the lens of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of education. As discussed, the three levels of education in the Philippine educational system namely, elementary, secondary, and tertiary, are seen to be in consonance with Whitehead's rhythm of education, and thus, Whitehead's philosophy is very appropriate in the Philippine context. In this context, the researchers suggest to consider Whitehead's educational theory as a guide in attaining the success of Philippine education.

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