

## REVIEW ESSAYS

### Educational Reconstruction: Ripples, Whirlpools, and Hurricanes

BY THEODORE BRAMELD\*

Entirely contrary to the wishful opinions of some educational historians, social scientists, and philosophers, reconstructionism as both policy and program of action is alive and thriving. At the editor's request, this essay-review illustrates and demonstrates the current status of reconstructionist theory developed, though not exclusively, in the United States as a philosophy of education.

Three persistent myths should be exploded. First, reconstructionism does not take the position that education is the primary agent of social or cultural change. Beginning with George Counts and continuing ever since, those who have been identified formally or informally with reconstructionism (regardless of any preferred label) have invariably contended that education could become a more influential force for change than it has usually proved to be in practice, but that it has never claimed to be a sufficient force. Its proponents have only insisted that education, even in its most potentially powerful roles, is and should become a continuous ally of other forces, often far more powerful ones—notably the economic and political, but also the religious, esthetic, psychological, and other dimensions of human experience.

Second, reconstructionism has been improperly constricted by the adjective "social." Although "social reconstructionism" is still preferred by some commentators, and although a group of theorists at the University of Illinois once emphasized this term more heavily than other associates ever approved, the majority of reconstructionists reject an over-emphasis on "social" as much too restrictive. As implied under Myth Number One, those who are sympathetic with the main thrusts of reconstructionist theory regard it more accurately as an evolutionary and inclusive world view. While "social" is certainly a necessary dimension, it is never an adequate one.

Myth Number Two leads to Myth Number Three. Reconstructionism is not a philosophic system or theoretical position that advocates or indoctrinates one major philosophic viewpoint to the exclusion of other viewpoints. While it does recognize, particularly, the influence of experimental naturalism, and while it tries to develop its own concerns grounded in that influence, it also insists very strongly upon the urgency of convergence among divergent streams of educational philosophic ideas and practices. Thus it respects several of such streams as manifested in both Western and Eastern recent movements of thought—especially philosophic analysis, phenomenology, neo-Freudianism, neo-Marxism, Zen Buddhism, and existentialism. Reconstructionism, in one sense, is the imperative expression of a syncretic mood that influences increasing numbers of philosophers, formal or otherwise, across many cultures.

The recent works selected by this reconstructionist to be exceptionally relevant share one characteristic in common: they deny all three of the myths just epitomized. Several works are more apropos than others to the common stream of recon-

\* Theodore Brameld is an affiliate of the Graduate Faculty, University of Hawaii.

structionist ideas. But all of them expose, in one fashion or another, all three. Moreover, none of these sources appeared before 1970; others of at least equal importance could be added were works of the sixties, for example, to be included.

Among comprehensive books of perhaps secondary or tertiary importance to education in a strictly institutional sense, yet of basic importance to the enrichment of reconstructionism as an emerging world view, I select only four: Lewis Mumford's *The Pentagon of Power*; Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*; Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*; and *Alienation*, by Bertell Ollman. These four writers have exerted at least indirect influence upon reconstructionists, but all four books are also of direct relevance.

Mumford, although still neglected by too many scholars and even more so by too many educators, provides a sweeping interpretation of his life-long theme, the transformation of man, beginning with "the age of exploration" in the fifteenth century and concluding with "the advancement of life" in the twentieth. Yet this work is only volume two of his even more gigantic *The Myth of the Machine*.

Fromm's major work may eventually receive recognition as his magnum opus. It is a meticulous, well-documented critique of a recent fad advanced chiefly by three widely read apologists (Lorenz, Ardrey, and Morris) of the still widely believed assumption going back to Thomas Hobbes himself—the assumption that the human species is brutal and malignantly destructive. Fromm, as a "socialist humanist," by no means subordinates the power of such destructiveness. Yet he also demonstrates its latent and actual power for what he terms its "benign" capacities. Reconstructionists, or anyone else for that matter, can benefit immensely from Fromm's way of striking a balance-sheet of negative and positive forces in man-and-culture. It is a necessity that must be recognized in every legitimate, tough-minded interpretation of our age.

The posthumous book of the late Saul Alinsky is not, to be sure, comparable in many ways with the preceding two. It is included, however, precisely because Alinsky is so utterly different from either Mumford or Fromm. He was, indeed, a genius in his own way—the brilliant, stubborn pioneer in teaching little people how to be "little" no longer in the sense of political and economic helplessness. In this inspiring testament, Alinsky demonstrates from his own dramatic experience that self-fulfilling prophecy does not necessarily lead to fatalistic defeat; on the contrary, it can and does lead sometimes to organized democratic power. His chapter on "The Education of an Organizer" is in itself far more useful to most educators, including teachers, than most typical books on "school administration" even begin to approximate.

The fourth selection among general works, again very different from the others, is *Alienation* by Bertell Ollman. Reconstructionists can take heart from Ollman's long-needed, thorough appraisal of a key idea originally developed in an extremely influential form by Karl Marx himself. It may still surprise many to learn that Marx was also a precursor of existentialists in his analysis of the alienated man, even though both his diagnoses and prognoses differed sharply from their own. In any case, since the influence of Marxist ideas remains potent in all reconstructionist interpretations, it is gratifying to observe the resurgence of interest in these ideas as exemplified by Ollman.

Two unusually provocative collections of essays support this latter comment:

*Radical Psychology*, edited by Phil Brown, and *Ideology in Social Science*, edited by Robin Blackburn. Both are recommended with admiration.

The vitality of reconstructionist perspectives is also illustrated by a number of stimulating books focusing upon education more directly than the group noted above. Of these, one is adapted for the title of this essay-review: *Educational Reconstruction: Promises and Challenges*, edited by Nobuo Shimahara. This book is sometimes eclectic. But so, for that matter, is reconstructionism in its own gropings for a viable approach to convergence.

Incidentally, Shimahara, associate professor at Rutgers (educational anthropology), has just completed a four-year period as chairman of the Society for Educational Reconstruction—a small but lively organization which, for half a decade, has held regular conferences, published its journal, *Cutting-Edge*, and is now engaged in a program of renewal and innovative projects under the chairmanship of David Conrad, associate professor of educational foundations at the University of Vermont.

Other books that contribute significantly, although rarely under a single philosophic rubric, include the sometimes confusing *Radical Ideas and the Schools*, edited by Jack Nelson, Kenneth Carlson, and Thomas Linton; *Social Change, Conflict, and Education*, edited by Edsel Erickson, Clifford Bryan, and Lewis Walker; Jonathan Kozol's *Free Schools* (an impressive growth in his own values); William Boyer's *Education for Annihilation*; and, last but by no means least, Martin Carnoy's *Education as Cultural Imperialism*.

This last book may well receive wide, deserving attention, as Ivan Illich notes in his awkward jacket blurb: "the first book which describes the central place which schooling has had in the development of the world-wide crisis of industrial society." Carnoy, a specialist in "international development education," provides a strong case against the prostitution of education as an ally of colonial and imperialist power both historically and contemporaneously. He devotes three substantial chapters, moreover, to the United States in a devastating analysis. In one sense, his book supplements the over-publicized and over-inflated *Inequality*, by Christopher Jencks; whereas the latter only feebly and belatedly confronts the crucial problem of multicorporate influence upon inequality in education, Carnoy attacks it head on. In his vigor and in his radical expectations, he is to be compared as a complementary pioneer to Paulo Freire's already nearly classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Both of these books also anticipate reconstructionism's favorite related mandates to our concluding quarter-century—futurology and globalism. The former mandate is illustrated both by Harold Shane's rather cautious, too heavily America-centered, but still helpful and timely introduction to futurology, *The Educational Significance of the Future*, and by Alvin Toffler's *Learning for Tomorrow*.

The latter mandate, globalism, is illustrated by two extraordinary books: Warren Wagar's *Building the City of Man* and John Walsh's *Intercultural Education in the Community of Man*. Both are essential to anyone willing to consider reconstructionist ideas in overall perspective.

Futurology also testifies to the reawakening of a fresh interest in utopianism—not in the habitual pejorative sense of escape and fantasy but, in Mumford's own terms, of utopianism as human reconstruction. Here a recent book of excellent readings is recommended—*Utopias: Social Ideals and Community Experiments*, edited

by Peyton Richter—for adoption as an undergraduate textbook in any college, liberal or professional, seeking curricular innovation in this too long neglected field.

The third of the myths mentioned earlier is the stereotypic habit of reducing reconstructionism to a single doctrine—a myth enjoyed by several historians who relegate reconstructionism to an allegedly outmoded period in twentieth-century American education.

Actually, because the reconstructionist orientation deserves no such absurd brush-off, it seems appropriate to conclude by noting (although regretfully only mentioning) a sample of recent books that can and should enrich that restless search for convergence which alone properly characterizes this orientation. Almost at random consider the following works of exceptional timeliness and quality: Maxine Green's *Teacher as Stranger*; Harrison Brown and Edward Hutchings, eds., *Are Our Descendants Doomed?*; *Education and the Endangered Individual*, by Brian V. Hill; *The Evolution of Nations Through Christianity and Communism*, by Stanley Singer; *Aims of Education* by L. M. Brown, editor; and *The Dimensions of American Education*, edited by Theodore Crane.

Finally, three recent books may be mentioned in educational anthropology—a field of special fascination to many reconstructionists: *Education and Cultural Process*, edited by George Spindler; *Culture and the Educative Power*, by Solon T. Kimball; and *Cultural Relevance and Educational Issues*, edited by Francis Ianni and Edward Storey. They cannot be overlooked by anyone concerned with the dynamics of education as cultural surrogate.

Reconstructionism is, then, very much on the march, not because it claims by itself to exert anything like a dominant impact, nor because the name itself is necessarily the most acceptable symbol, but because reconstructionism proves to be a cultural barometer, or rather a fever thermometer, of an acute period of regional, national, and planetary upheaval. In such a period, education is revealed to be one conspicuous symptom.

Will educational leaders, whether theorists or activists, realize in time that they, too, contribute their share to the causes and cures of this upheaval? Or will they prove, at least by default, that the Mumfords, Ollmans, and Carnoys, for example, are much closer to the truth about education as power than most of us are able or willing to concede?

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