*Commentaries/ Opinion Articles*

The Philosophical Foundations of the Philippine Social Studies

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ABSTRACT

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| The paper explores the philosophical foundations of Philippine social studies. It basically analyzed the documents including Philippine laws, Department of Education Orders, and other scholarly and education commentaries. It is enriched with insights gathered from journals and books on philosophy.  The commentary emphasizes the role of philosophy in social studies as foundational in shaping curriculum and instruction. Social studies continues to assert its place in education, yet faced by challenges within its study area, along with the fulfillment of grand aims for inclusive education and critical role in education. The teaching of social studies should be contextualized for instruction, process-oriented, and community-based. |

*Keywords: social studies, philosophy, curriculum, instruction, critical*

1. INTRODUCTION

The task of finding the philosophy behind Philippine Education is a difficult endeavor. It requires not only a thorough understanding of the Philosophies but also of the Philippine Education. This paper will not then be overly ambitious as to provide a Philosophical grounding of Philippine Education but will focus on the different philosophies in Social Studies. As a Social Studies major, the author is required to be oriented of her field of concentration with a firm footing on philosophy that lays foundation to Social Studies.

While there are plenty of literature dealing with the educational philosophies such as the five major philosophies to include perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, social constructionism and existentialism by definitions and general characterization, its specific application in area study or concentration is yet to be explored.

Additionally, there is a need to examine Philosophy in a specific context. Recognizing this Sinclair (2008) explained that Philosophy is a Western phenomenon and that eastern philosophy was more embedded with religion and culture like “cult figures”, and that Philosophy was the making of western civilization and its triumph over other world cultures. This brings about the question of what type of Philosophy is studied and emphasized in Philippine education. There is a tendency to focus more of Western thoughts more than Eastern Philosophy. Perhaps this is found in the number of books on Philosophy from foreign authors and how most Philosophy books deal with so many foreign Philosophers that lead one to wonder if there are Filipino Philosophers. Is it just Jose Rizal or does he qualify as a philosopher? The danger of always adapting foreign thinking is that it is not contextualized. It has always been a Filipino practice to look into foreign materials in solving Philippine problems even involving education, possessing a culture of borrowing. It is a wonder again if it is ever because of the type of thinking Filipinos were raised into. Is it ever a Filipino exercise to question things?

As a subject area in Philippine basic education, the philosophy underlying social studies requires examination. This paper will answer the following: what is the importance of Philosophy in Social Studies Education; what are the issues in Social Studies Curriculum; what are the philosophical foundations of Social Studies included in curriculum and instruction. The essay ends with how the author envisions the Social Studies Curriculum, to what philosophies she adheres.

2. discussion

**2.1 Philosophy in Education**

Every human activity has its philosophy (Sinclair, 2008). Additionally, the serious study of Philosophy brings about benefits: intellectual benefits as it develops critical thinking and ability to analyze problem; it gives social benefits by learning to see different perspectives and understand society; it has personal benefits by lifting our thoughts, among many others. Granted this importance, philosophy is intimately related with the aims of education.

Philosophy exerts its influence in the curriculum and instruction. Curriculum is all the planned learning opportunities offered by the organization for the learners (Print, 1993). As explained by Gutek (2009), curriculum planning and organization questions into what knowledge and what is valuable to the learner. He explains that curriculum includes what are written and what are not written. He clarifies that what is worth for the learners include metaphysical, epistemological, axiological and logical dimensions. The disagreements in these dimensions result to Philosophies in education. As read, educational philosophies and theories constantly change depending on social, economic, and political climate at a time. So that Philosophies can co-exist in the same school and few educators operate from single philosophical perspectives (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2010).

On the other hand, instruction means those activities that the teacher or instructor undertakes to enhance student learning (Print, 1993). It is subsumed in curriculum, where teachers have more participation since teachers actively engage in instruction. The teachers determine the objectives, topic, strategies, and assessment for instruction. It is here that Philosophies also matter. The study of philosophy provides opportunities for teachers to examine practices and an avenue to reflect deeper into the knowledge emphasized, organized, and presented through strategies. Thus, for teachers to know the Philosophy in prescribed courses in teacher programs is to understand directives and the curricula, and subsequently reflect on the Philosophy that guides decisions and adjustments in their instruction.

An important point to ponder too is the application and methods used for Philosophy in education. Education is defined as the total social processes for cultural life, a more formal one takes place in the school (Gutek G. L., 2009). The traditional methods of Philosophy consist of thinking without special interaction with the world (Williamson, 2007), a suggestion is the practice of reading actual selections including brief historical and social commentary of thinkers (Johnson & Reed, 2008). Philosophy in education and classes could allow hands-on experience of learning the context of Philosophies and reading the actual writings of Philosophers for verification. This is done to better appreciate the context, space, and time that these philosophers lived.

**2.2 Foundations of Social Studies**

Although a product of a long history of debate, the consensus definition of the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) by Edgar B. Wesley is that Social Studies is “the social sciences implied for pedagogical purposes” (Evans, 2004, p. 147). Simply, social studies is an integrated studies of social sciences for teaching purposes especially for elementary and secondary students. While other definition of Social Studies envisions a unitary field comprising a fusion of materials drawn from the disciplines but ignoring disciplinary boundaries and organized around the needs of society, of students, or of some combination thereof (Hertzberg, 1981). The 2023 definition of social studies by the National Council of Social Studies “is the study of individuals, communities, systems and their interactions across time and place that prepares the students for local, national and global civic life” <https://www.socialstudies.org/media-information/definition-social-studies-nov2023>.

While always overlooked, philosophy must be examined in the teaching and learning and its crucial role in Social Studies Education. It is important to investigate the Social Studies curriculum and instruction. The Social Studies went through changes in the curriculum even the conception of the term Social Studies. Social Studies had its roots in the United States. Prior to the term, traditional history, chronological and textbook-centered dominated the curriculum. It was in 1916 Report that resulted to a marked deviation from existing form where more emphasis was to social problems, on recent history and to the interests and needs of students. The definition evolved around those time “Social studies as subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups’ (Evans, 2004) p24. It was a period for Progressivism for Social Studies. Yet Essentialism critiqued Progressivism since the matter on content and integration of discipline, the role of students’ interests and form of education was debated. By 1930s with the Depression, the disciplines argued for their study but resolved for history as a synthesizing discipline. This period developed Reconstructionist philosophy as critique to Progressivism. By World War II, the emphasis on content was on war-related topics and peace education. It saw the death of Progressivism as Realism became more relevant. The 1950s made Social Studies more directed towards the disciplines. The debates on philosophy in Social Studies focused on attack on Progressivism as it is claimed to be anti-intellectual. By 1960s the New Social Studies sought for change in content, materials, and methods of instruction. It called for the return to traditional history that continued in the 1970s for going back to basics to essential knowledge and skills in education. The 1980s saw the rising demand of science and technology and had further implications to Social Studies teaching in the United States.

The Philippines, a former colony of the United States, adapted American influences in its education. The US Social Studies was transplanted in the Philippines. Even after postwar Philippines, American influences were still present. Thereafter, important curriculum documents include: the 1982 New Elementary School Curriculum (NESC) and 1989 New Secondary Education Curriculum (NSEC), where the NESC made arrangements of different elementary school curriculum with Grades I and II as Sibika at Kultura and Grade IV to VI as Heograpiya/Kasaysayan/Sibika or Geography/History/Civics (<http://www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-26-s-1986>) while the NSEC allotted one of the eight subject areas to social studies (<http://www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-11-s-1989>). Other changes include the 1997 Philippine Elementary Schools Learning Competencies and 1998 Philippine Secondary Schools Learning Competencies. The 2010 Basic Education Curriculum included Understanding by Design (UBD) literacy and 21st century core skills for global competitiveness.

Perhaps the 2002 Basic Education Curriculum greatly changed the role of Social Studies that placed social studies under the Makabayan Curriculum, reducing the contact time for social studies. The K to 12 Curriculum further reduced instruction to three hours a week in Grades 7-10, and the lowest of 30 minutes or 2.5 hours a week in Grades 1 and 2. These added to the apprehension to Social Studies teacher meeting the objectives of class with limited instruction time allotted to the subject.

The K12 provided another important change to spiral progression of curriculum. Assessment changed from end of Grade 10 in the junior high school to the end of Grade 12 for senior high school. The K12 social studies curriculum provides for a Constructivist theory, collaborative learning, experiential and contextual learning, and chronological presentation, conceptual, integrative, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary method. The social studies curriculum’s goals include skills in investigation, interpretation of information, research, communication and ethical standards. It further provides themes in Araling Panlipunan Curriculum from peoples and environment, time and changes, culture and identity, rights, responsibilities and citizenship, power, authority and government, production, distribution and consumption, and regional and world relations. The new Matatag Curriculum is a revised basic education launched in 2023 aiming to focus on foundational skills, decongestion of the curriculum, and focus on integration of values and peace education. Specific to social studies, the emphasis were the “big ideas” and civic competence. All these are welcome changes to Social Studies as well as issues arising.

**2.3 The Issues in Social Studies Education**

There are several philosophical questions from issues in the Philippine education today. Some of these issues touch on curriculum and instruction in Social Studies. The philosophical questions in education focus on the knowledge structure, purpose of education, and the role of teachers, learners and community.

2.3.1 Relevance and Struggle within Social Studies

There are some contrasts in the aims and implementation of social studies. It is easy to claim that Social Studies develop critical thinking, the passiveness in the part of students deprives creativity, judgment and decisions can be readily seen in Social Studies (Ozmon, 2012). Others say that Social Studies is developing good citizenship, while others claim that “Social Studies is little more than nationalistic bias that reinforce chauvinistic tendencies” that there is built-in bias of what good citizenship as a narrow and provincial outlook (Ozmon, 2012 p171).

There must be an emphasis of the social science disciplines as content and methods in social studies. Each discipline possesses its own focus and methodology that can uniquely contribute to the study of man. In some sense, there must be retention of the basics and essentials by sticking to the enduring disciplines and methodology for education. For example, the history discipline in the Social Studies use the source study with its effectiveness remains. Another issue is textbooks and controversial issues so that Social Studies is continuously revised based on social sciences (Gutek G. L., 2009). Here, textbooks and the influence of social sciences effect the growth of Social Studies.

The charge against Social Studies education is that it is not relevant. With technology and advancement in natural sciences, the relevance of Social Studies is seriously questioned. The emphasis on the required skills for work and professions limited the social sciences in higher education institutions (HEI) to general education courses only. The same marginalization of social sciences is observed in the senior high school in the secondary education. Given that college and senior high school curricula place less emphasis on the social sciences, what then remains is to strengthen Social Studies in the basic education. The challenge for a strong sense of identity, citizenship education, critical thinking or the aims of Social Studies education must start in the early years --- again, in the basic education.

2.3.2 Inclusive Education and Education for the Silent

Over the course of its official curriculum, Social Studies underwent changes in intent and content coverage. What is clear is how the society and the period influence curriculum. Social Studies was transported from American experience. Evidently, the early years then was for Filipinos to appreciate American civilization, and mold Filipinos to become citizens based on American standards. The initial years of America in the Philippines further the division created by Spanish colonization. The policies towards the Christian and non-Christian “tribes”, where the latter particularly the Moros were called “wild” in official documents. The type of education clearly made distinction. The years that followed also made the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and minorities in the country at a disadvantage where instruction sometimes disregard cultures. What is dominantly presented in the curriculum and textbooks were mainstream cultures. Perhaps from Critical Theory, there must be an evaluation of the dominance and marginalization due to cultural, political or cultural differences.

2.3.3 Critical Use of Social Studies

From the beginning of Social Studies and History teaching the memorization of facts was the dominant practice. While traditional history and source study is staple in the teaching of history, social studies is often regarded as mere memorization of facts. The critical thinking and reflection of social issues, and developing informed judgments are sometimes overlooked. The past and recent curricula gave emphasis on critical thinking and thinking skills, it only seemed rhetoric as it is limited in actual practice.

**2.4 How Social Studies be Taught, Underlying Philosophy**

As response to the issues faced by Social Studies Education, the following points are raised on social studies purpose, teaching and learning process, and the teachers, students and community.

1. Purpose of social studies education as relevant, inclusive, connected, and useful;
2. The teacher must possess the attitude, the values and beliefs, and the content and pedagogy;
3. Teaching and learning is a process; it takes reflective thinking and decision-making for teachers.
4. That teaching and learning includes the whole school culture, and even the community.

First is clarity with social studies purpose. Social Studies must be valued in the curriculum and by teachers. Essentialism focus on essentials and basics; there are subjects regarded as essential such as the natural sciences and mathematics. Social Studies as subject is also serving an important aim --- citizenship education, critical thinking and development of human person. While not similar with the natural sciences, Social Studies aims are equally as important with other “basic” subjects. Connected here is that the aim of Social Studies is Humanism since the discipline speaks of history, literature and philosophy. Social Studies is Reconstructionist, the challenge for Social Studies teachers is to make it meaningful for students for social reform and transformation. There is a need then for Social Studies to assert a greater emphasis and importance in the curriculum through the Department of Education Curriculum and pronouncements.

Second is the crucial role of teachers. Teachers’ experiences, personal background, values, beliefs and attitudes influence teaching. Teaching is a reflection and response to the needs and aspirations of the society. Here Social Studies is strongly a Social Reconstructionism since it relates to how schools change society or how society affect schools. Due to the content of Social Studies such as social, political, economics makes it a key area for Reconstructionism. Social Studies is always under appraisal due to changes in the society (Gutek G. L., 2009). In research of eighth and eleventh grade students to inquire on students’ attitude towards Social Studies, a theme emerged that active involvement and teacher enthusiasm plays an important role in Social Studies teaching and how much students regard the subject (Chiodo & Byford, 2004).

Third is the process. The teacher must combine content with appropriate pedagogy consistent with the suggestion that teaching must be based on the culture and context of students. It must be mentioned that there are approaches to Social Studies teaching, an interesting addition is providing the benchmarks on historical thinking and structure proposed among others by Peter Seixas. Even in the history of Social Studies teaching in the Philippines, the project method found its way in the curriculum (Acierto, 1980), this method largely associated with Progressivism. Another is that it is crucial that the Social Studies coming from difference social sciences contribute holistically to understanding of society with each social science utilizing its methods to supplement Social Studies.

Last, the requirement that the education is a community responsibility must not only be rhetoric. It must be a sincere act of really addressing the ills and problems of society. The intent in teaching Social Studies must be relevant to the times and useful for students. Teachers must also work on inclusive education where different communities are made to participate and are valued in the educational system. There is connection between school and society. While it is the society that influences education as seen in the present situation, the schools must take assertive role in changing the society in positive ways. At the center of it must be Social Studies.

3. Conclusion

The intent of Social Studies Education is philosophical. The aims of Social Studies are based on what are valued ---to develop citizenship education, critical thinking, the human person with strong sense of history and political maturity, among others. These valid aims deserve a place of importance in the Philippine curriculum. Social Studies can only rely on these grand aims but that curriculum developers and teachers must assert and continually enrich Social Studies teaching. What was seen in this paper is that foundations of Social Studies are products of different Philosophies. It is in that sense that understanding of the curriculum including intent and content of Social Studies necessitates the appreciation of philosophies underlying as well.

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