

Oh, That Terrible Task of Teachers to Teach Psychology in the Philippines

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To improve the quality of the teaching of Psychology in the Philippines, one should look not just at course descriptions from school catalogues but also inside the classrooms. Who are the actual teachers of psychology? What do they teach? How do they teach?

NONPSYCHOLOGISTS AS PSYCHOLOGY TEACHERS

In the tours of various colleges and universities in the Philippines, one thing has become obvious, namely, that by far the large majority of psychology teachers do not have any degree in Psychology, not even a bachelor's degree. Instead one finds teachers, guidance counselors, sociologists, educators, political scientists, etc. How does one account for this phenomenon? I see two explanations.

The first reason is the very small number of psychology graduates. Especially small is the number of Master's degree holders. After all, psychology departments in the Philippines are a recent creation. Even in the University of the Philippines, psychology became a department only in 1926 and at the Ateneo de Manila only in 1960. It is hardly to be wondered at that the demand has outstripped the supply.

The second reason is that in the state that classroom education is in today, one need not have studied psychology in order to teach it. Any half-intelligent teacher who can read a standard American textbook in Psychology and can talk reasonably loud in a large classroom is accepted by most school administrators. Students do not complain, as long as tuition fees remain low. The present standard of Philippine education demands only book knowledge, i.e., the ability to repeat (in Manila Chabacano) what is in the book, and examinations are geared to test whether one can thus repeat the book.

Unfortunately, the results of such a system is the failure to bring a deep understanding of man or create insights into the workings of his mind. In the ordinary course of events it is insight in the teacher which should open insights in the student, and enthusiasm in the teacher which should rekindle enthusiasm in the students, and such insight and enthusiasm are not usually found in untrained book-teachers of psychology. (There are, of course, exceptions. I must acknowledge a debt of gratitude to my first teacher in psychology, a biologist, whose enthusiasm in the study of man was contagious and overflowed from biology into psychology and into me).

But time and the ever-increasing numbers of MA graduates in the universities will, it is hoped, solve this problem of trained teachers. The problem of teacher-quantity will be solved. It is more to the problem of teacher-quality that we should, however, turn our attention. What kind of teachers are we turning out from our M.A. or the M.S. and the Ph.D. degree programs? Allow me, without offense to anyone, to draw some whimsical sketches of psychological type of teachers that appear on the Philippine scene. By so doing we may begin to understand the problem of teaching psychology in the Third World.

THE PIOUS PUPILS OF PIAGET

Psychologists in the Third World generally obtain their training in the First World and usually maintain warm feelings for their mentors. Such, for instance, are the pious pupils of Piaget. They know the various stages of growth of European children, their mental growth and their moral growth, the various ages at which these European children graduate from one stage to the other. But unfortunately, what do they know about Filipino children? Do they not realize that child-rearing practices in the Philippines differ so much from similar practices in Switzerland that Filipino children are bound to grow, differently from Swiss children? The pious pupils of Piaget have learned to think Piaget's thoughts but have not learned to do as he did, namely to look at the children around him and reflect on their growth. (Is this not also why similar graduate students tend to finish their course-work but cannot do the thesis, because they cannot reflect on the *real* environment?)

Were the pious pupils of Piaget less pious and more realistic they might do one or both of the following:

1. Using Piaget's categories, measure when the Filipino reaches these stages of development. This is the level of "revalidation," which is the least any self-respecting teacher can do.
2. Break away from or modify Piaget's categories and draw up categories from the Filipino experience. This is the level of "theory formation," which at least the Ph.D.'s should do.

THE DARING DISCIPLES OF DRUCKER

The daring disciples of Drucker go beyond Piaget's pupils in that they not only teach Drucker's ideas, but they even prescribe Drucker's solutions to organizational problems without even asking whether or not such solution works in a Philippine setting. When Filipino managers are unable to carry out they are "resistant to change." It is in reaction to such O.D. enthusiasts that the Executive Suite in Makati has made it a policy not to ask any newly returned MBM graduates from the United States to be a speaker at the Executive Suit until after he has had two years of experience in the Philippine setting.

In similar reaction to O.D. enthusiasts, Meliton Salazar (of the Asian Institute of Management) has this to say: "Those who teach MBO do not practice it. But the kind of "MBO" they practice works." Furthermore, to the unaware worshipers of American

democranalists, what would you do? You would do what you are doing now." Thus, the problem is that such disciples have acquired beautiful ideas, but have never challenged them nor have they ever re-conceptualized their own actual behavior. What they need is to reflect in themselves, on Philippine culture, on the effects of certain imported behaviors in Philippine culture, on their own assumptions (and blind worship) regarding the "advanced" status of American techniques in business organization. They may suddenly discover that Filipino or Chinese organizational systems are far superior in this part of the world, that they themselves may have preached the importance of "feedback" but have not listened to it, that it is better to do organizational development in the Philippines than to talk about it, that they need to be less daring but more effective.

Incidentally, the blindness that adopts American confrontation methods, learned at Esalen and, without modification or self-reflection, puts them to use in the Philippines has been disastrous. One such training group consisting of about twenty people now has seen half its members break up their marriages. Such marital splits are naturally rationalized as "self-awakening." There is little awareness that Philippine transpersonalism long ago discovered the importance of transcending the self for the sake of the bigger life-group, that the typically Asian values of patience, reconciliation and forgiveness result in greater happiness and meaning in life than ego-feeding measures, which Philippine culture sees as *bastos* and *walang biya*. In the end, these people who reject Philippine culture find themselves obliged to emigrate and to lead lonely lives in London, Los Angeles, or Montreal, working as human relations experts.

THE FERVENT FOLLOWERS OF FREUD

The point, then, becomes clearer and clearer, that the basic assumptions of Western psychology are not necessarily fulfilled in Asia and that therefore Filipino practitioners and teachers of psychology must be willing to challenge the principles they learned in American graduate schools. Take the fervent followers of Freud, father of Western psychotherapy and counseling. Their present practice is to work in an office, in 50-minute sessions, setting up a one-to-one relationship, aimed mainly at strengthening the individual ego. How painfully alienated is such practice in an Asia of teeming millions, most of whom do not possess a watch and have little sense of time, and who simply cannot endure being the target of a one-to-one relationship with an educated man.

After having long been myself a fervent follower of Freud I have since discovered that Filipino counselees are more truthful when seen amid a group of their friends, prefer nonverbal techniques to verbalized self-revelations, enter readily and gladly into hypnotic trance (unlike Freud's patients), and get well without necessarily verbalizing every sorry detail of their problem. They get well that is to say; they can reenter into meaningful relationships with their primary group.

Basically, the Filipino ego differs from the West ego. The Western ego is like a hardboiled egg, individual, unmixing. The Filipino ego is like several eggs fried together in one pan, in which the yellows mark separate persons but their whites fuse with each other so that one does not quite know where one egg ends and another egg begins. Thus, a therapy, which assumes the hardboiled individuality of a patient, can be disastrous for one

whose self-image is a part of a group, from which he derives meaning. Getting well is most often getting back to the frying pan rather than escaping from it.

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDENTS OF SKINNER

Put in other words, the response of an Asian subject to a particular stimulus can be worlds apart from the response of an American subject to the same stimulus, probably because one and the same stimulus is no longer the same when found in a different gestalt such as culture is. The consequences of such a fact or the teaching of psychology in the Third World can be fearful. At present the typical psychology department in the Third World sports a collection of psychology books and journals, ninety-five percent of which comes from the Western world. Since the behavioral research they contain have been mostly on Western subjects, there rises an obligation to put a sign that read something like this: "The Philippine Minister of Education and Culture has certified that the behavioral conclusions in these articles are true of the American population but not necessarily true for Filipinos. Readers should beware for their intellectual health."

Of course, the scientific students of Skinner have one advantage. Being much devoted to the laboratory they are more familiar with experimental data than are their book-bound brothers. Furthermore, Philippine pigeons differ less from American pigeons than do their human counterparts (we supposed). But is it not possible now further to declare their independence from the interests and instrumentations of the United States? Having once learned scientific methodology, should they not now apply this methodology and create instruments to answer question that face a developing nation, such as to formulate learning strategies suited to the Filipino or to stabilizing behavior therapy workable at the out-patient clinic of the Philippine General Hospital? As for instrumentation, can they not use simple things, available in the Third World, for the teaching of scientific methods, such for instance as a simple drinking glass, empty to test the scientific bases of the "spirit of the glass," or filled with water, to test the crystal-ball phenomenon of image-projection, a phenomenon mastered by the local *albularyo*? After all, it is methodology in observation and conceptualization, which makes for science, not necessarily the technology sophistication of one's instruments. Why should the provincial schools lament their poverty? Instruments cannot create intuition, but intuition can create its instruments.

TEACHING TEACHERS

Once more, then, the question arises: How do we teach intuition, creativity, methodology, and research initiative? How do we get teachers of psychology to transcend Plaget, Drucker, Freud, Skinner? We can say to them: "Yes, you of the Third World, it is good for you to have learned under these masters to the full, to have absorbed their ideas and practiced their techniques. But unless you cannot go into your own environment and do what they did in theirs, you are not a pious pupil, nor a daring disciple, nor a fervent follower, nor a scientific student."

CONSCIOUS CONCEPTUALIZATION

To be a psychologist, then, one must, after having studied the books, let go of the books, turn to the human reality around him and begin to reflect. The data seem at first amorphous and it is here that one first supplies the *kakapa-kapa* system described by Carmen Santiago and so much endorsed by Dr. Virgilio Enriquez. Patterns, then, begin to form and it is then that the true psychologist must apply constant, consistent, but most of all conscious conceptualization. Only the Filipino psychologist can transform amorphous data into meaningful concepts, which can be deeply relevant to Philippine life. Only *then* can refined hypotheses be deduced and sophisticated instrumentation devised to test these hypotheses. The trouble with Third World Psychology is that we started with refined hypotheses and sophisticated instrumentation before there was intuition. We learned too readily and too well. Unwittingly we became a species of intellectual *tuta*, running in the company of greyhounds and feeling that we can never catch up with them.

As a matter of fact, we sit in the midst of a psychological researcher's paradise. Because of our hybrid birth, we possess intuitions of East and West. Our bilingual or trilingual upbringing gives us entry into several simultaneous worlds. We have only to turn to our environment and begin the task of conscious conceptualization.

WHAT TO DO

The first thing we should do is to give priority to a Ph.D. program based precisely on the principles of: (1) experience, (2) reflection, (3) expression. Foreign Ph.D. programs cannot give the fundamental experience from which all reflection, research, research writing should come. Furthermore, recent research has shown that 40 percent of Filipino graduate students in the United States are lost to the Philippines in a brain drain, whereas only 5 percent of graduate students in the Philippines are so lost.

The second thing is to break the school structure, which allows a psychology teacher merely to repeat what the textbook has to say. Accordingly, the school in the process of teacher evaluation for promotion should require that all psychology teachers (unlike teachers of history, philosophy, theology, etc.) should have two sides to their teaching jobs. Classroom teaching and a psychological practice. Industrial psychology teachers should be working for or within industry. Clinical psychology should have a clinic side by side with their classroom. Counseling psychologists should be doing counseling. Experimental psychologists should have a laboratory. Otherwise psychologists should become like that Korean teacher of English, who all his life told his pupils of the wonders of "san-do-wichi" (sandwich) which he had never seen, until one day he happened to enter a G.I. recreation center and was given a hamburger, at which he exclaimed "So this is san-do-wichi!"

Thirdly, we should expect all psychology students likewise to do laboratory or field research. Every term paper should be half library research and half empirical research.

Lastly, the PAP might set up certain norms of expectations for graduates of different levels. For instance, we might expect from all M.A. graduates the mentality we can call

“revalidation,” that is to say, an understanding that ordinarily, all U.S. behavioral findings must be “revalidated” and test norms restandardized in a Philippine setting. Ph.D. graduates on the other hand should be expected to be able to challenge American theory, create Philippine concepts, set up Philippine hypotheses and theories. They should also be able to challenge the validity of Americans tests and devise their own.

To sum up, the problem of Psychology at the moment in the Philippines and in most of the Third World is that almost all data and theories originate from the West and are inapplicable to the Philippines. We end up with a pseudo-science, which contribute further to a low level of what passes as “education” in most of our colleges. The PAP should strenuously combat this pseudo-education by demanding that its certified teachers should be empirically based, i.e., should personally be experiencing, reflecting, and expressing Philippine reality. By being true psychologists they make their contribution to Philippine education.