

ISSUES IN PHILIPPINE EDUCATION

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Suddenly education is "in" as an area for research, with social scientists rushing in to study a relatively new field. Since education has been singled out as an important variable in socio-economic development, it now merits the close attention of economists, particularly the planners, and other social scientists. Of course others have preceded them. There are the psychologists who have been lending educators their expertise in testing and measurement, in understanding personality development and socialization, in verifying the efficacy of certain instructional materials such as films; the philosophers who have urged the clear definition of objectives and the formulation of a consistent philosophy of education; the sociologists and anthropologists who recommend understanding social structure and culture to make schooling more effective. Finally, the economists prescribe that we see to it that the economic returns from education be sufficiently large to make it beneficial to society and the individual. In the process of receiving this technical assistance we have been overwhelmed by various theories and principles. Thus we have traveled the tortuous path of Freudianism, neo-Freudianism, Parson's theory of action, structural-functionalism, Roger's non-directionism, Skinner's operant conditioning, and others too numerous to mention here. Depending on the cult of the moment we have been made to understand that unless we familiarize ourselves with certain theories, principles and educational practices, we would be hampering the developmental process. We have been awed by the language of the technocrats. Such terms as development, systems analysis, input-output, critical path analysis, feedback, payoff, rate of return, cost-benefit, performance criteria,

management know-how, resource allocation, are constantly dinned into our ears.

All of this reduces to a basic charge: formal education has not achieved what it was supposed to do in the first place, and perhaps the social sciences can assist in facilitating such achievement. After so much technical assistance extended to education, so many new modern approaches and innovations proposed, so many theories and principles, you will readily understand why an ordinary teacher like me doubts as well as hopes that the proposed reforms in education will work.

I think that educational problems are so complex and of such a magnitude that there are no easy or ready solutions available. There are far more dropouts and out-of-school children and youth than pupils and students, far more illiterates than we care to admit, far more people in the labor force than can be employed, far more of them suffering from hunger, poverty and illness than we can feed and make healthy.

I propose that the language of development be reduced to terms that ordinary people can understand. If a country claims that it is pushing the developmental process vigorously and intelligently, the questions we should ask are: What has been happening to unemployment? To hunger? To illness? To poverty or to the gap between the rich and the poor? If there has been a reduction in these matters, then there has been development, the GNP notwithstanding. This may be a simplistic way of looking at development, but it has the merit of being readily understood.

Now what has education to do with all this? It is claimed that education, formal and non-formal, should be instrumental in providing the

individual with basic social and communication skills, with values that should make him more development-oriented, and with specific skills and knowledge that qualify him to be employed or self-employed. If you read the national, elementary, secondary and higher objectives of education you will find that some aims are virtually unattainable on an operational level – another impressive phrase.

The constitution states that:

All education institutions shall aim to inculcate love of country, teach the duties of citizenship, and develop moral character, personal discipline, and scientific, technological and vocational efficiency.

This is familiar language to educators; their problem is that of translating such exhortations into particular courses of action in the school and classroom.

Some of the new educational reforms are actually intended to solve the numbers problem or the population overflow in the schools, even as it is claimed that they will also improve the quality of instruction. For instance, the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) is a mechanism for controlling student population at the college level. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. For as long as we have a ladder system of education which emphasizes educational credentials, an entrance examination is a logical instrument for selecting those who are to receive college degrees. The only trouble is that it would also increase the number of unemployed secondary graduates, just as controlling entry into high school would augment the large pool of unemployed elementary graduates. To be fully effective as a selective or screening mechanism, the NCEE should be applied jointly with scholarships for poor, able students and a national accrediting system. The latter, however, is politically unacceptable. With some 600 institutions of higher learning serving a small country and representing various interests, it is extremely difficult to impose a uniform system of accreditation. On a verbal level, virtually all colleges and universities accept the necessity of accreditation as a way of rationalizing higher education, but once im-

plementation impends, there is a rush to prevent it, primarily through political methods.

The problem of improving elementary education is not as simple as it seems. For one thing the curriculum is overloaded with some eight or nine subjects competing for allocations of time. The typical elementary pupil has a schedule of 20 minutes for character education, 140 minutes for language arts, 30 for social studies, 30 for mathematics, 30 for health and science, 30 for music and arts, 40 for work education and 20 for physical education.

We should not harbor any illusions that a schedule of fragmented subjects like this will induce love of country, positive attitudes toward modernization, let alone employability. Worse, many pupils drop out at the third or fourth grade, thus increasing their chances of losing the incipient literacy acquired.

Moreover, there are additional curricular prescriptions today – moral education, the constitution and tax consciousness, cooperatives and land reform, population education, consumer education, nutrition education, food production and the Green Revolution, Buy Filipino movement and drug education, wise consumption and utilization of natural resources. These curricular imperatives have been given such high priority that sometimes they replace the subject content which is presumably being taught during a particular class period.

Since few from the poor majority even come close to a college education, providing a useful, and if possible, inexpensive basic education for them is the heart of the problem. Thus the Ranis Report recommends that we improve the quality of elementary education instead of investing our limited resources in expensive formal vocational/technical training for secondary age youth; it also urges that we invest additional funds in the better state-supported colleges and universities. (This is a self-serving statement, but I am only repeating other people's views). According to the same report, it would be wiser to place vocational/technical training largely in the hands of nonformal agencies, which can offer short term demand-oriented courses as well as longer ones

tailored to fit the changing job market. We should not interpret this to mean the total elimination of inexpensive work education which provides some relaxation from study and may, hopefully, develop healthier attitudes toward manual labor.

Since elementary education is of limited value as an instrument of socioeconomic advancement, what should its chief function be?

There seems to be some consensus that it should focus on basic communication skills, including the language of elementary mathematics, which is of special urgency today; and on the development of values associated with development: self-discipline, positive attitudes toward work, commitment to country and people.

The first develops sufficient literacy to allow the graduate to participate in basic societal functions; it also facilitates employment to a limited extent. It is for this reason that barrio people generally regard the school as a place where their children can learn to read, write and speak English, so that they can qualify for jobs. They cite the fact that applicants for janitorial positions must fill up forms in English; thus this language is essential for employment. As for elementary mathematics, in a monetized barrio economy, virtually every child learns how to count.

The question of values is considered crucial to developmental change. In the sense that the child learns to be punctual, to observe the rules and regulations of the school, he is being modernized, i.e., he is being prepared to participate in organizational activity. But in another sense, some of the values embedded in our culture which have been absorbed in the home, community as well as the school — excessive respect for age, submission and obedience to authority figures, *utang-na-loob*, *pakikisama*, the lack of achievement-motivation — are considered dysfunctional for development. This is a proposition that is open to question. Lacking adequate empirical evidence, the schools have chosen to emphasize favorable attitudes toward work, specially manual skills,

self-discipline and social commitment as representing the values required for development. Perhaps there is nothing really wrong with this — imputing a causality function to certain attitudes and values. What evokes doubt are the means chosen to develop such attitudes. Will knowledge of the constitution, taxation, land reform, etc. really instill development-oriented attitudes? Will work education, Youth Civic Action Project (YCAP) activities, such as they are, promote self-discipline and achievement-orientation? At the moment there are no answers to these questions, for I know of no research on the subject. Perhaps social scientists can address themselves to this problem and give us some answers.

Thus education presents not only a tremendous quantitative problem, but its qualitative problems are probably even more difficult to resolve. It is my impression that there are too many demands on the schools.

The conventional response to new demands on the educational system may be described as two-fold: a managerial approach designed to minimize waste through better organization of resources, and curricular accretions back-stopped by modern teaching approaches and techniques, most of which are essentially quantitative.

The recommendations of the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education (PCSPE) are avowedly intended to rationalize an already existing system, not to replace it with a radically different one. Moreover, it is important to note the distinction between rationalization and development. The two should not be equated for one is merely a means to the other.

The curricular approach is standard operating procedure. Thus in addition to the plethora of subjects already entrenched in the school program, there are the new ones already mentioned. While it is true that most of these are subsumed under existing subjects, they nevertheless entail the preparation of instructional materials and the retraining of teachers. Examples of approaches and techniques are continuous progression, criterion-referenced

norms, the in-school off-school community approach which is a modified version of the old community school concept, self-learning kits and modules, and programmed learning.

In summarizing the changes it is tempting to describe them as more of the same: more subjects, more topics, more techniques, more examinations, more strategies of teaching.

If the ultimate goal is social change, i.e., equalization of opportunity and acceleration of social mobility, we must raise questions as to the internal structure of the system, the relevance of its activities to these larger objectives, and its products.

No less than President Marcos said in his report to the nation:

Almost a century ago, it was said in the Western world that there would be no need for a scheme of economic redistribution as long as "an egalitarian educational system assures to rich and poor alike a competence in those things which are the riches of a human being — his learning, his skills, his opportunities in life! . . . But history unfolds itself in ways that defy the most confident of our assertions. Rather than as an equalizer in society the transmission of learning has often reinforced the inequalities of society. The pursuit of education can lead along paths that prove inimical to the realization of national government.

This turns our problem around and compels us to consider whether the schools as they now operate are not only contributing to development, but may actually be impeding the process. It would be useful to look at schools as social institutions and what it is they are actually doing. This has been done in the U.S. and some Latin-American countries.

There are several propositions (Klief 1973) in this somewhat painful point of view which have been derived from a study of American education. It is up to us to draw the parallels in our own situation.

1. Institutions are processing plants for people and skills; their chief business is socialization. If socialization is regarded as coterminous with life, then it can be seen that the church, clinic, the factory, the college and

the prison also engage in socialization, into meeting the person at various contingencies in his life and determining his identity.

2. Institutions have a synthetic rather than a unitary function. What is church-like about the school? What is family-like about it? What is factory-like, hospital-like, and prison-like about it? In some schools — e.g., some slum schools where children are deliberately trained in social amenities such as boys lining up outside the classroom to wait for girls to enter, learning to pour tea and serve cookies elegantly — the public school could be regarded as a finishing school or a sort of family. In schools where there is an emphasis on production, the endless test battery scores and marking business make the school resemble a factory. It is as if teachers were employed on a piece-work basis. On the other hand, some schools seem like hospitals with special adjustment rooms for emotionally disturbed pupils. As for what is prison-like about schools in some upper middle class schools children cannot talk while eating their 15-minute lunch; because of the rule of silence, they develop an elaborate system of nonverbal communication as if they were inmates of a prison or a Tibetan convent. Some slum schools are run like jails; maximum security is enforced constantly by teachers, principal and school counselors. In a sense the school could be studied as a part of the larger socioeconomic system and viewed as a complicated machine for sorting, ticketing and routing children through life.

The Philippine educational system was originally an American transplant and still retains many colonial features such as the ladder three-level structure, a grading system based on projects, written work and examination, the programmatic allocation of time during the day, a school calendar, ritual activities such as opening and closing ceremonies, rites of passage such as graduation, rites of intensification such as pep rallies and class reunions, implicit rules on administrative behavior, teacher behavior and pupil behavior, a bureaucratic hierarchy from which directives to the field are issued. From grade one up the child is socialized into his role as pupil. By example, coercion, and word of mouth he learns what is and what is not allowed in school. Up to college, he learns to edit behavior and language carefully in the presence of authority. If he fails

the examinations, he does not get the proper factory label and drops out. This reduces his chances of improving his lifestyle. The latest labeling measure is the NCEE exam, essentially a quantitative measure to prevent a population overflow at the tertiary level and consequently at the employment level. Employment practices based on the possession of these labels (certificates, diplomas, etc.) reinforce the sorting and classificatory functions of the school.

3. The school, as Waller maintains, is a 'museum of virtue'. The dichotomy between the idealized world of the child and the realistic one of the adult is institutionalized in the school. The lower middle class teacher who, as Riesman maintains, had missed being trained in poise, turns it into a big industry, a zealous quest for the all-rounded and colorless personality. It is as if the mass media never existed or never trained pupils in manners and morals.

4. Schools, as Durkheim points out, are guardians of the national character. Teachers train children in terms of an ideal client, a person suited to what the dominant group in a society likes to see produced.

In the American system the middle class virtues of the Protestant ethic, patriotism, hardwork, cleanliness, achievement-orientation and until recently, a Puritanic code of morals, constituted the values taught by the school.

Here we are trying our best to promote the work ethic and social orientation through work education and requiring students to render service in some social service capacity within the YCAP program. Officially, we are trying to rid ourselves of the *utang na loob* and *pakikisama* complex, which observers consider inimical to development, but in our lessons in character we reaffirm the value of obedience and submission to authority, respect for age, family solidarity, politeness and deference.

If pupils and students depart from these norms, they become "problems," necessitating special counseling. The ultimate resort is to reject or fail such deviants who will then remain outside the mainstream of society. Moreover, if pupils observe a discrepancy between actual

adult behavior and the idealized in school lessons, this difference is not likely to be lost on them.

5. Schools, as Peter Berger has said, are churches for drilling children in the religion of democracy. The perceptual sphere of children is narrowed down to focus only on the history, that is, official mythology, of a particular society and a particular social class . . . That ethnic groups in America, as part of their status politics for social mobility, had to clean up textbooks and ask to be cut in on a piece of the action in American history is not taught in school nor in college for that matter.

6. Schools, as Summer has emphasized, teach the predominant orthodoxy of society, not the full range of beliefs and values in society.

In American history the role of the Indians has been downgraded until recently. In the Philippines, until recently Philippine histories have consistently presented the Filipino Muslims as pirates and smugglers, and the other minority groups as backward and deprived.

Insofar as ideology is concerned, it does not matter whether it is moral, political or religious — the prevailing orthodoxy is taught — whatever it is at the moment. In fact within the subculture of formal education some beliefs partake of the nature of religion. To cite one instance, the idea of science and technology as a key to development has led to the establishment of science centers, special science high schools, and special training for teachers and prospective teachers. The faith in the power of science amounts to a religious belief. Instruction in science rarely calls attention to its malutilization.

7. The school is not only an academy where the pupil acquires an identity. He is there told what he should do and get, and hence, what he should be. There he learns to make out, to work the system. How a child is turned into a pupil, how a boy is turned into a man and how a girl is turned into a woman would be a worthy object of study in sociology and urban anthropology.

Does the school equalize opportunity? In the American system the unhappy answer is

that it does not, it strengthens the existing social structure by routing and labeling the middle class child to the disadvantage of the poor such as the blacks and other minority groups.

What about the Philippines? In setting up vocational/technical institutes, college entrance examinations and perpetuating the grading system, we are in effect promoting the interest of a particular social class whose children are more likely to negotiate the system successfully. The opportunities of the college graduate are greater than those of the high school graduate, whose opportunities are greater than those of the elementary graduate. It is futile to deceive ourselves that the school dropouts still have a chance at social equality and social mobility. Everything in the larger socioeconomic structure strengthens the ladder system of education. In reality the full beneficiaries of the educational system are the elite two percent, the college graduates and the holders of graduate degrees who occupy the upper reaches of the economy, while the majority must settle for less rewarding jobs, if they get jobs at all.

How then, can the schools become genuine contributors to social change? At the moment there seem to be no ready answers. There are radical thinkers like Ivan Illich in Mexico and Paulo Freire in Brazil who believe that the American type of education has been dysfunctional for their societies, benefiting only the few who pass its quality controls and permanently disabling the poor majority from socioeconomic advancement. Illich (1973) has proposed the abolition of schools and the setting up of knowledge and skills centers where an individual can go at any time during his life to improve his skills or learn new ones as the economy of the society changes. Grades, marks, examinations and labels would have no place in such a system.

This paper has suggested a perspective hitherto unexplored on an extensive scale. Perhaps the wisest course would be to review our educational policies and programs and, not least, to restudy ourselves.

Note

At the time she read this paper Priscilla Manalang was Assistant for Curriculum Development of the Office of the Vice President for Academic Services, University of the Philippines System.

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