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Education and Economic Development in the Early American Period in the Philippines

CHESTER L. HUNT

No aspect of the period 1900-25 in the Philippines is as dramatic as the establishment of a school system by intrepid American teachers. Working in a strange land, with pupils to whom English was a strange tongue and handicapped by uncertain financial support, they succeeded in making a major educational advance.¹

THE SPANISH LEGACY

The American teachers had to start virtually from scratch, since years of warfare had nearly eliminated any trace of Spanish educational efforts. It is, however, no disparagement of the American program to point out that the Spanish authorities were aware of educational needs and had taken significant steps to meet them.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the Spanish approach had been mainly what is now termed "informal education." Schools were provided for Spanish children and a very small number of the *Indios* (the Spanish term for the natives). Most of the population were never inside a school room, but their lives were, nevertheless, dramatically changed by the missionary work of the Spanish clergy. The priests moved the people from scattered farmsteads into settled villages, taught them the rudiments of the Catholic faith, trained competent artisans in the building trades and introduced a European type of agriculture and stimulated craft industry. The classic description of Spanish missions indicates the prominence of work in handicrafts:

1. Bonifacio S. Salamanca, *The Filipino Reaction to American Rule* (Connecticut: The Shocstring Press, 1968).

... I have seen some of the convents transformed into schools of art, into shops for carpentry and iron works, into cloth factories where neat and elegant textures were woven of silk, pina . . . , jusi, Chinese flowered silk, hemp, and cotton.²

While the priests were responsible for major changes in the Philippine economy, this does not alter the fact that formal education was extremely limited until the nineteenth century when liberalization in Spain affected the Philippine administration. Then, a number of trade schools were established and, in 1863, government-supported universal primary education was decreed. An additional indication of the concern for vocationally-oriented training is indicated by the activities of the Economic Society of the Friends of the Country. Alzona summarizes these:

... It commenced its educational activities in 1823 by distributing gratis 1,320 copies of books on grammar, orthography, and reading designed for popular use. In the following year, it ordered the translation, printing, and free distribution of a practical book entitled, *Guide for the Lancastrian Mutual System of Education*. The book popularized the Lancastrian method in the Philippine schools . . . It established a school of drawing in 1824, from which students were graduated in 1828. The society also published a manual of the elements of drawing. In order to foster the weaving industry, it paid for the instruction of eight Filipinos in the art of dyeing. In 1938, it sent some young men abroad to study mechanics. . . . In addition, the society offered prizes for literary works on the economic conditions of the country and for useful invention. For instance, in 1853, it awarded a prize of 2,000 pesos and a medal of honor to Candido Lopez Diaz for his invention consisting of a machine for cleaning abaca.³

Primary education grew rapidly after 1863. For instance, in Manila in 1836, there was only one primary school with an enrollment of 80 pupils. By 1868, there were 30 schools with 3,386 enrolled. By 1896, with a population of around seven million, there were 200,000 children in the Philippines attending school.⁴ This is the same figure reached at the end

2. Vicente Sanchez Belloc, *Los Misioneros en Filipinas*, Madrid 1895 cited in Bazaco, Evergisto, *History of Education in the Philippines* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1953).

3. Encarnacion Alzona, *A History of Education in the Philippines, 1565-1930* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1932).

4. Antonio Isidro, *Compulsory Education in the Philippines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), p. 16

of the first school year during the American regime; which, however, dropped to 145,614 four years later. It moved ahead irregularly until 1935 when 1,202,000 were enrolled in the public schools out of a population of eleven million.⁵

Most authorities feel that the Americans made much more rapid advances in providing education, especially of a vocational nature, than the Spaniards would have achieved. But not all are agreed. Thus, Alfonso Felix, Jr., President of the Historical Conservation Society comments:

... The United States spent a lot of time and effort doing away with the educational foundation. In 1896, the official language of the archipelago and its lingua franca was Spanish which was then being propagated by schools all over the country. The United States could have accepted the linguistic situation here, this was not done. An enormous amount of effort was spent in making English the new national language... it... led to our present linguistic anarchy... an observer looking at the national scene today [1976] would see that English is slowly vanishing as Spanish was once made to vanish. He would see that democracy had collapsed, he would see the economic condition of the masses it wretched.⁶

Admittedly, comment on what the Spaniards or an independent Philippines might have done if the Americans had stayed away is speculation. No one can really say whether another government would have made an equally energetic push for education or whether its policies would have been more successful. So, while giving due credit to Spanish accomplishments, let us look at what actually took place during the American period.

INITIAL AMERICAN PROGRAMS

A few weeks after the occupation of the city of Manila in 1898, seven schools were opened and a teacher assigned to each. The Philippine Commission appointed by President McKinley in 1900 called for the improvement of the education already inaugurated by the military and said, "They should regard as of first importance, the extension of a system of primary education which shall be free to all."⁷

5. Carl H. Lande, "The Philippines" in James Coleman, ed., *Education and Political Development* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 315.

6. Alfonso Felix, Jr. in a foreword to Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr., *American Institutions in the Philippines* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1976).

7. *Hearings Before the Committee on the Philippines of the United States Senate*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 108.

One of the first decisions was that of language. At first, it was taken for granted it would be Spanish until it was learned that Spanish was spoken by not more than 20 percent of the population. Most spoke a local language of which there were several, no one of which was intelligible to a majority. English had the advantage of being a world language and one known to the American teachers.

The choice of English as the language of instruction was a controversial decision at the time and has been more so since. The use of English has facilitated contact between Filipinos and Americans and the current popularity of English makes it a cosmopolitan tongue whose study is being promoted in many countries. On the other hand, many Filipinos feel that nationalism demands an indigenous language and they also argue that the burden of having to learn English has slowed Filipino students and lowered educational achievement. A Filipino language based on Tagalog, the language of the Manila area, became the national language and is now used in the primary and secondary schools along with English. There is, however, a fear that the national language emphasis is driving out English and Filipinos are still debating whether the initial decision to make English the language of instruction was a blessing or a curse.

Even before peace was established, the Americans moved energetically to set up a system based, to some extent, on the American model. Discharged soldiers were supplemented by teachers hired in the United States. The most famous of these, some 540, came on the Transport SS *Thomas* and were known as Thomasites. There were never enough American teachers for all instructional work. They averaged some 800 until 1910, 450 to 1920, 350 to 1930, and only 100 to 1940.⁸

Although the first primary schools were taught by Americans, they were soon turned over to Filipino teachers and Americans were mostly in secondary schools and supervisory positions.

Funds for the schools were dependent on Philippine revenue and schools were often closed in times of financial depression. Attendance was also a problem. There was considerable enthusiasm for education, but farmers sometimes felt their children's labor was more important than schooling. Schools never expanded to the extent that they could accommodate all of the school-age children and those in existence had irregular attendance. The drop-out rate from First Grade through Sixth was a problem. During the school year 1907-08, 63,178 pupils moved

8. Lewis E. Gleck, Jr., *American Institutions in the Philippines, 1898-1941*, p. 34.

from Grade One to Grade Two, 31,101 from Grade Two to Grade Three and only 13,849 from Grade Three to Grade Four.⁹ Educators estimate that it usually takes seven years of schooling for a Filipino child to develop competence in English.¹⁰ In 1925, the Monroe Commission sought to evaluate Philippine public education and found that fourth-year high school students in Philippines public schools had the reading competence of American students in Grade Five.¹¹

In summary, the Americans both restored the public schools of the Spanish regime and greatly expanded them, but still failed to reach more than half of the potential school-age population. American teachers were in short supply and Filipino educators, for a long time, had training which was minimal in the extreme. Some spoke of going to school in the morning themselves and then teaching in the afternoon! Attendance was irregular and less than a fourth of the students who entered Grade One finished Grade Six. Language was a problem and achievement tests placed Filipino children in an unfavorable light compared to American students.

The difficulties of the Philippine schools were tremendous and student achievement was far below the norms of Western countries. The inadequacies of the schools were so great that one wonders how they could have had any influence at all. But this is not the whole story. A sizeable minority of students did profit from their schooling and became a leaven with a major impact on the whole society. The question for the remainder of this article is the extent to which their education directed this group into viable economic activity.

VOCATIONAL OR GENERAL EDUCATION?

The American period in the Philippines began about the time Booker T. Washington was proclaiming the utility of vocational education for American blacks. His theories impressed many American educators, especially Fred Atkinson, the first American general superintendent in the Philippines. He wrote:

9. Report of the Director of Education, 1908, p. 96.

10. Gerardo Flores, "A Study of Functional Literacy in the Philippines," *Fundamental and Adult Education Bulletin*, vol. 3, July 1951, pp. 24-28.

11. Board of Education Survey, *A Survey of the Educational System of the Philippine Islands*, Bureau of Printing, Manila, 1925, p. 134. The survey was a survey of Philippine Public Schools. *Ibid.*, p. 505.

... In this system we must beware the possibility of overdoing the matter of higher education and unfitting the Filipino for practical work. We should heed the lesson taught us in our reconstruction period when we started to educate the Negro. The education of the masses here must be an agricultural and industrial one, after the pattern of our Tuskegee Institute at home.¹²

Atkinson's policies ran into two problems which have often beset vocational education. One was the difficulty in getting suitable equipment.¹³ The other was a negative reaction by Filipinos. Bernard Moses, Secretary of Philippine Public Instruction in 1902 asserted, "Industrial education has met and will continue to meet certain obstacles. The people have been accustomed, under their earlier instruction to regard education as a means of putting themselves in positions where manual labor is not required."¹⁴

David Barrows, the next director of the Philippine Bureau of Education, did not share Atkinson's enthusiasm for vocational training. In his annual report for 1908, he declared, "To those who advocate practical instruction, I reply that the most practical thing obtainable for men in a civilized community and their most desirable acquisition is literacy."¹⁵

Barrows was followed in office by Frank White, an ardent supporter of industrial education. Under his direction, vocation training was placed under central direction which meant that most primary schools had instruction in traditional handicrafts and that each student worked in a school garden—sometimes cultivating an individual plot of ground, other times, joining in the cultivation of a larger garden and, in some cases, the student took care of a garden on a plot owned by his family.

Dean Worcester was quite impressed by the garden program:

It teaches them not to be ashamed to work. It also makes possible the introduction of home gardens and, through this means, brings the practical production of vegetables into the life of the people with the result that unused yards and vacant lots are put into cultivation.¹⁶

12. Fred Atkinson, "Present Educational Movement in the Philippines." Typed manuscript found in the Bernard Moses Papers of the Bancroft Library. Cited in Glen A. May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines 1900-1913* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 93.

13. Ibid.

14. Report of the Philippine Commission, 1902, pp. 881-82.

15. Report of the Director of Education, 1908, p. 15.

16. Dean Worcester, *The Philippines, Past and Present*, (New York: Macmillan, 1915), p. 511.

Probably Americans overestimated the influence of the school gardens, but even though many students did not become horticulturists, the gardens still had considerable influence. For instance, the editorial writer of the *Manila Bulletin* credits the garden program for promoting the cultivation of what has become a major crop:

At the turn of the century, corn was hardly considered a field crop in the Philippines. The newly arrived American teachers at once started the school and garden program and got every school in the Philippines madly growing corn and entering national corn growing contests.

Most of the corn grown in the Philippines today is raised by those who learned how in the primary and elementary schools, and by the children and grandchildren of these people.¹⁷

One vocational feature which became popular was the training of nurses, inaugurated at the Philippine General Hospital and Central Philippine University. Nursing provided a modest livelihood for a few hundred young women for years. In the 1970s it had become a major export as thousands of Filipinas sought nursing careers abroad.

In spite of the emphasis of several American administrators on vocational education, this was not reflected in the curriculum choice of the majority of students. At the high school level, where students had some options, they usually chose the general or college preparatory courses. Schools in Pampanga probably were fairly typical in this regard:

A survey of 207 of the 305 graduates of Pampanga high school between 1912 and 1921 revealed that 41.5 percent became teachers, 18.8 percent took up professional careers, 15.4 percent had clerical jobs and 15 percent were still studying. Only 3.4 percent of the graduates went into farming.¹⁸

Even more indicative of the general rejection of blue-collar careers was the tendency of those graduating from agricultural or trade schools to leave the fields for which they had been trained. This is indicated by the data compiled by the Monroe Commission.

17. *Manila Bulletin*, 23 March 1952, p. 8.

18. John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (California: University of California Press, 1972), p. 252.

Present Employment of Members of Eleven Classes Graduated From the Batangas Farm School From 1914 to 1924 and Five Classes Graduated From Oriental Negros Trade School From 1920 to 1924. Facts Given in Percentages.

Occupation	Batangas Farm Sch.	Oriental Negros Trade Sch.	Occupation	Batangas Farm Sch.	Oriental Negros Trade Sch.
Studying	41.2	47.4	Commerce	2.3	1.3
Farming	24.0	6.6	Military Serv.	.3	0
Skilled Labor	2.3	14.5	None	2.9	10.5
Teaching	11.3	7.9	Unknown	4.9	2.6
Clerical Serv.	4.4	9.2	Total	100.0	100.0
Prof. Service	6.4	0	No. of cases	345.0	76.0

Source: *A Survey of the Educational System of the Philippine Islands*, The Board of Educational Survey, created under Acts 3162 and 3196 of the Philippine Legislature, Manila Bureau of Printing, 1925, p. 336.

Apparently, the agricultural or trade school graduates were more interested in using their educational credentials as a roundabout route to white-collar careers than in following the vocations for which the schools had presumably prepared them.

Although, in comparison with the period before the American occupation, much progress was made in vocational education, this did not seem to alter the basic picture of a school system preparing graduates for nonexistent white-collar employment. Thus, in 1925, after nearly a quarter of a century of American directed education, the Monroe Commission lamented the continued white-collar orientation of education.¹⁹

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE SCHOOLS

Admittedly, the Philippine schools did not succeed in developing a curriculum which interested many of their graduates in farming or industry. Further, because of inadequate funding, irregular attendance, school drop-outs and language problems, many students failed to achieve any type of academic competence. Thus, neither the advocates of vocational training nor those who praised general education as a basis for citizenship can claim success.²⁰ However, to conclude from this that

19. Board of Education Survey, *Survey of the Educational System*, p. 35.

20. May, *Social Engineering*, p. 126.

the schools had little impact would be a mistaken oversimplification. Even though the ambitious dream of universal education was not carried out in the American period, the attempt to do so and the attention given to education did change the Filipino cultural milieu. Observers today tend to forget the contrast between American educational policies and those of other colonial powers who usually regarded education as an unproductive expenditure which might endanger colonial rule.

Although it never reached the goal of universal education, the American push to expand the schools was a dramatic contrast with the comparatively lethargic movement of other colonial powers, as well as with the Spanish regime which preceded it. The Americans succeeded in more than doubling the proportion of literates, and American teachers definitely influenced the Filipino perception of education. While the American teachers never comprised more than a fraction of the teaching staff, they were a very conspicuous presence whose influence was greater than their numbers would indicate. To a far greater extent than other Americans, they made personal contact and, to some extent, became role models. In Pampanga, for instance, Larkin reports that the teachers were remembered decades after their departure although the names of other Americans had been forgotten.²¹ Fredrick S. Marquadt, born in the Philippines and the son of American teachers, reports on a common phenomenon and draws a rather optimistic picture:

One of the biggest problems encountered by the early American teachers was instilling in the people a respect for the dignity of labor. Taught by the Spaniard that the object of education was to avoid manual labor, the average Filipino student didn't want to soil his hands. It was quite customary, until the early teachers stopped it, for the wealthier students to have their houseboys carry their books to school for them. On more than one occasion, when school gardens were laid out or vocational courses in woodworking were started, the richer pupils wanted their servants to do their work for them. But once the idea was impressed upon them that there was nothing shameful about manual labor, they dug into their work with that enthusiasm which is one of their national traits.²²

The American teachers not only exemplified the importance of education, they also challenged the prevailing value system which was hardly one promoting economic advance. Jose Rizal, in his famous *Sobre*

21. Larkin, *The Pampangans*, p. 144.

22. Frederick S. Marquadt, *Before Bataan and After* (Indiana: Bobbs Merrill, 1943), pp. 38, 39.

la Indolencia de los Filipinos, argued that the alleged indolence of the Filipino was due to the glorification of poverty by the Spanish Catholic clergy and their admonition to accept one's station in life rather than aspire to higher material attainments.²³

Even discounting such a charge, "it is clearly evident that such teachings offered little in the way of a moral or ethical base for material acquisitiveness, hard work or business discipline and no challenge to 'change the world'."²⁴ On the other hand, American teachings advocated pragmatic, practical approach.

The thrust toward practical progress through American-sponsored education was picked up by Filipino savants. One of these, Camilo Osias who became a prolific writer of textbooks, suggested a creed for the public schools which included the following:

I believe that life in the barrio can be made as pleasant, as hygienic, and as profitable as life in the town or city.

I believe that by keeping more chickens and by careful selection of breed I can double the output of the flock.

I believe that by keeping a good home garden we can increase, vary, and improve our diet.

I believe that by better selection of seeds and plants we can double our crops.

I believe in pluck and not in luck.

I believe in the dignity of labor and in farming as an honorable calling, and

I am glad that work and gardening are taught in school.²⁵

Even though industrial education never rivaled the prestige of academic subjects, some of the individual vocational teachers were influential. One of these was Charles Glunz, a manual training teacher in Silliman University, a Protestant mission school. Gleek gives an account:

Charles Glunz, the prototype of the rough-and-ready, mechanically-gifted and dedicated jack of all trades without which no mission can prosper, left his mark more humbly. Sufficiently colorful himself to be the subject of many an

23. The essay was first published in *La Solidaridad* in Madrid in 1890. An abridged translation appeared in the *Philippine Quarterly*, March 1952.

24. Chester L. Hunt and Thomas R. MacHale, "Education and Philippine Economic Development," *Comparative Education Review* 9 (February 1965): 6.

25. Camilo Osias, *Barrio Life and Barrio Education* (New York: World Book Company, 1921), p. 37.

amusing anecdote, a separate Glunz legend, amounting to a cherished image of a lovable if irascible campus character, emerged over time. The embodiment of a practical and energetic American, Glunz had no patience, for example, with what he considered silly local superstitions. Thus he ordered certain campus trees and bamboo clumps, reputed to be the abode of powerful spirits, be cut down despite all protests. His instructions were followed to the letter, but those who executed them, it is said, took the precaution of apologizing to the spirits for the desecration they were obliged to commit.²⁶

A statue of Glunz stands in front of one of the Silliman buildings and as late as 1962 several Dumaguete contractors indicated it was the influence of Glunz which directed them into the construction business.

Not only was the work of the schools augmented by Protestant institutions, but Catholic schools as well began to stress a more worldly type of instruction. More and more, an "Americanized" Catholic Church provided leadership rather than a following in focusing on material goals and the motivations and skills that are to gain such goals. Course content and orientation in Catholic schools reflected this fact throughout the country.

No attempt to evaluate the economic impact of education can ignore the effect on values. It may also be true that some of the critics had too narrow a view of vocational education. Even though the agricultural schools failed to inspire a devotion to farming and few graduates of other schools followed trades they learned in school, it may still be true that education had an economic impact. It is interesting to note, for instance, that when he looked at the Philippines, J.S. Furnivall did not share the opinion that overly academic education was developing a class of educated unemployed. Furnivall had studied colonial regimes extensively, although his major experience was in Burma. He commented that the American regime had a tremendous demand for English-speaking clerks, stenographers and teachers. He regarded the schooling which supplied people for these jobs as "strictly utilitarian, vocational."²⁷ He also noted that the schools responded well when there was a greater demand for business employees:

With the stimulus to trade and industry consequent to the Tariff Act of 1909, the war in Europe, and the opening of the Philippine National Bank, the

26. Lewis E. Gleck, Jr. *Americans on the Philippine Frontier* (Manila: Carmelo and Bauernman, Inc., 1980), p. 97.

27. J.S. Furnivall *Experiment in Independence: The Philippines*, Frank N. Trager ed., (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1974), p. 60.

change in the environment created a demand for businessmen and engineers. By 1930, there were 1,647 students in private colleges taking courses in commerce and business administration and 1,193 training as engineers.²⁸

There is at least one empirical indication that education promotes attitudes supportive of economic development even when it is not directly associated with economic activities. An investigation of the reaction of Filipino farmers to innovations found receptivity to innovation varies directly with the amount of education.

Whether this involves fencing chickens rather than letting them run loose, castrating hogs, immunizing livestock against disease, scientific selection of seed, or participation in cultural activities, the results are the same.²⁹

CONCLUSION

From the standpoint of its professed aims the promotion of education in the American period in the Philippines can hardly be considered an unqualified success.³⁰ Education never became either compulsory or available for the majority of the school-age population, many of whom never entered school while the majority of those who matriculated left before finishing the sixth grade. Nor were the academic achievements of even high school graduates on a par with average performance in the United States. English never replaced the indigenous languages and a confusion of language policy remains to this day. Likewise, vocational education never had the emphasis American administrators desired and even students in the few vocational schools tended to use them as an indirect route to training for white-collar employment.

On the other hand, the schools did have an impact. Both American and Filipino teachers promoted a consciousness of progress and mobility in contrast to the relatively static attitudes fostered by the more traditional Spanish schools. Specific practices such as the cultivation of corn were spread through school influence and the schools produced a frame of mind more open to innovation. Literacy increased and communication

28. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

29. Felicidad C. Sycip, "Factors Related to Acceptance or Rejection of Innovations," Community Development Research Council Abstract, Series 8, University of the Philippines, Diliman, 1960.

30. May, *Social Engineering*, p. 124. May has an excellent analysis of the early American programs of education and my discussion of the events prior to 1914 is based largely on material cited in pages 77 to 126 of his book.

expanded between town and country. English did become widespread enough to provide English-speaking workers in the Philippines and to facilitate the employment of Filipinos in many other countries as well.

Predictions about a mass of educated unemployed have not come true. Economic progress, which was rapid in most of the American period, has been less satisfactory recently but this is not the fault of the schools. The American expansion of education laid the foundation for a school system which has prepared millions of Filipinos to take their place in the modern world. When and if the Philippines develops a viable development strategy, the educated manpower is there to carry it through.