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The National Mental Health Conference

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The Science Education Area sessions brought to light some remarkable unanimities among the educators. It was agreed that many of our science curricula are out of date. It was agreed that the government should have far less control over curricula. It was agreed that the schools should be more serious in providing adequately trained professors and in providing these professors with schedules and facilities which will allow them to mature scientifically. Many of the roadblocks to improvement were pinpointed and responsibilities were fixed.

But what will come of all this agreement? Unless the Department of Education, unless the administrators of universities are willing to *actually* make use of the findings of the various sessions, nothing but talk will be the result.

One thing seems clear, however. The National Science Development Board is willing to assume the leadership in assisting both the government and the universities to implement the suggested changes. It can be hoped, therefore, that the prodigious laborings of the mountain will bring forth a more worthy progeny than the "ridiculous mouse" mentioned by Horace. The way is clear and well-marked for significant changes in the science climate of the Philippines. It only remains to *take* the forward step.

WILLIAM J. SCHMITT

The National Mental Health Conference

The Second National Mental Health Conference, held at the Pines Hotel in Baguio City from October 22 to 27, 1961, brought together from all over the country educators interested in an exchange of ideas about guidance, especially as related to the Conference's theme: The Problems of Counseling in Philippine Colleges and Universities. Besides the dozen members of the Conference Committee there were in attendance about 30 delegates and an equal number of observers.

Dr. Gumersindo Garcia, Sr., president of the Association, in his opening talk praised those present for taking time and care to examine personal problems in their local and personal context, but emphasized that in any solution we must ultimately turn to God; that is, a person's values stem from his attitude toward God. He was followed by President Vicente G. Sinco of the University of the Philippines, the keynote speaker. Mr. Sinco remarked that, while education plays a multiple role in the life of the individual as such, concern for the betterment of

education also involves attention to the economic, social and cultural needs of the country as a whole. Many changes have come about because of scientific and technological development, hence it is no longer true, he believes, that the education of the past is adequate for the present. Now more than ever careful planning is necessary. The university's aim is to "make the student learn how to learn". To prevent lopsidedness in the fulfillment of this aim, it is the guidance personnel who must, with renewed awareness of their responsibility, direct each student to his exactly proper task through the close analysis of individual aptitudes, interests and attitudes and the assignment of an accurate role in education as based thereon. Basically, then, the educational counselor is the one entrusted with the great task of identifying and properly tapping the human resources of the country and thus ensuring that the national structure will be solid and enduring.

The Conference program continued with consideration of the preparation of future counselors: where are they to come from, how are they to be trained. Dr. Adoracion Arjona of Far Eastern University reviewed the prevalent trends in other countries. The point-at-issue that seemed to develop was that, while certification of a counselor's professional qualities should still be required, certification by itself is perhaps not enough, since the criteria by which certification is given may well differ from place to place according to the differing guidance programs of the institutions providing the certification. In short, the validity of the certification will all too often depend on what "guidance" may mean in a particular school's view.

Brother Lucian of De La Salle College, sensing a future as well as present shortage of counselors, suggested in-service training of interested and competent teachers, who would carry out the college's objectives under the supervision of trained personnel. Father James Culligan of the Ateneo de Manila followed, dealing chiefly with the selection problem and the areas in which training should be concentrated. As a result of his remarking that *whom to select* depended on *what they were being selected to do*, considerable discussion about the exact nature of the counselor's role ensued; and brought unanimity only on the point that no truly adequate description of the counselor's role has as yet been formulated. In regard to the preferred training areas there was, however, unanimity, even more, insistence that the trainee should have acquired a broad cultural background, should have had at least minimal teaching experience and should have specialized in psychology, philosophy and the actual techniques of counseling.

An undercurrent of opinion which became somewhat evident during this discussion is worthy of note. It was that there could be moral neutrality practised by the counselor or even that he could simply avoid the problem of moral decision. The attitude marks a glaring deficiency among many of our counselors. Some participants felt that the matter

should be taken up explicitly at a future meeting and thoroughly thrashed out, since moral problems are perhaps the chiefest ones of student counselees.

Turning from theory to practice, a professional discussion of the various techniques of counseling was set up at another general session. The discussants included a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, a social worker, etc., with the purpose of spotlighting different approaches to a counseling problem. In each case the aim was to identify the root difficulty, then to provide assistance. The common method was the non-directive one, that of enabling the counselee to get insight himself into his own problem and with the aid of this insight himself assume the initiative in reshaping his personality. Of interest here was the fact that the discussants, each one of whom is highly trained professionally, in the end each "played it by ear" — much the same as the general medical practitioner does in making his judgment after gathering and collating the symptoms. Among the excellent points made during the general discussion were the following: the general inhibition and shyness of Filipinos; the prevalence of the language (i.e. communication) difficulty; a somewhat nebulous fear of the non-directive counseling approach; the lack of adequate information about certain points in the Filipino cultural background, e.g. sensitivity, attitude toward authority. An important issue raised but never adequately answered was: "How far can a counselor go?"

Despite the poor preparation of the case study (i.e. a quasi-actual case presented and solved before the audience) it provided a spring-board for a lively discussion. The points brought out most clearly were 1) the danger of not having adequate data; 2) the danger of not checking the developmental history in the referral situation; 3) the absolute need for the counselor of a psychological background and a good acquaintance with the process of child development.

In general the Second National Mental Health Conference made clear both our present assets and present liabilities. The chief liabilities, apart from a glaring dearth of counselors, were poor psychological preparation, lack of knowledge of socio-cultural factors, and inadequate internship programs. These weaknesses must be remedied by well planned and structured programs in our universities. Our present in-service training is "crash-type" and only a stop-gap.

The Conference did, however, accomplish its main objective, which was to exchange ideas and especially to bring before educators the pressing necessity of selecting and preparing adequate counselors for our colleges and universities. Dr. Esperanza Limcaco of the University of the Philippines, the conference director, should be congratulated for these solid results, results which will be made even more widely effective when the Conference Proceedings appear sometime in January.

JAMES F. CULLIGAN