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Some Problems of Philippine Education

FRANCISCO ARANETA

THE purpose of this paper is to raise fundamental questions and to seek a general orientation, not to offer specific solutions for the myriad problems of our educational system. There are three facets to the problem of education in the Philippines and these three facets must be viewed. First, there is the problem of objectives, or what we may term the cultural problem. Secondly, the question of means, or the economic problem. Finally, the matter of policy, or the political problem.

THE CULTURAL PROBLEM

Education is the molding of a person. Principally it is the molding of the mind, endowing it with knowledge, with basic attitudes, with selected skills. This molding is not achieved in a vacuum. The process of molding is achieved by intimate daily contact with a particular culture, formally or informally. As much as is humanly possible, formal education should be an intelligent process, the person being molded to a clear image and with the conscious objective of enabling him to live gracefully and effectively in a particular society.

The problem therefore becomes one of determining for what specific society a young person is to be prepared; and once that is determined to decide what cultural influences should be brought to bear on this growing person to achieve the end desired.

The problem can be crucial and complex even when we have a parent making these decisions merely for his own children. The problem is vastly magnified when we have a state endeavoring to solve the puzzle for all of its young citizens.

The problem is minimal if we assume a static society, which for generations—perhaps centuries—has seen little change; where over its confines from end to end, a stable and completely uniform culture has taken general possession, and there has emerged throughout the entire nation a homogeneous group, where differences are individual and not cultural.

In such a society the problem of educational objectives is non-existent. For what society shall the young boy be trained? Obviously, for the existing society, here and throughout the nation, because by supposition there has been no change in this society in the past hundred years, except for the individuals who compose it. What cultural influences shall be brought to bear on any young man of this homogeneous community? Well, what other cultural influences are there to be called upon, except the traditions, handed down from father to son over some five, six or seven generations without apparent change?

But what if a society is unstable? And what if it lacks this cultural homogeneity of our first example? What if the problems the new generation faces are quite different from the ones that their parents faced? What if the society and culture are pluralistic, many-faceted? Should one in a case such as this hand down his culture, truly beautiful, deeply loved because so long his own, yet fashioned to solve problems of another era, and supposing a unity of culture even in the details of living that are rarely the same from region to region?

Think now of the Philippines, where social and cultural change have brought about divergence not only of one generation or century from its predecessor, but also of one region from another here and now. And there is nothing strange about this, for there is no *a priori* reason to expect that all those who live within the boundaries of the same political unit will possess the same culture—nor should such a conformity be imposed on them.

It is from this twofold fact—cultural diversity and the admissibility of cultural pluralism — that a problem in centralized educational control can and does arise.

There is in the Philippines an undeniable cultural diversity, for although there is a basic uniformity to be discovered in the ways of life that characterize Filipinos from the most widely separated parts of the Philippines, this uniformity is so basic as often to be on the level of unconscious drive and theme. What appears on the surface, as one compares the urbanite with the farmer, the wealthy with the poor, the uplands and the lowlands, Moslems and Christians, is a striking difference of goals, traditions, language, and external habits.

To give a practical example. Some years ago I taught the *Principles of Economics* in college out of a textbook which has had rather wide international acceptance. The text is by Samuelson, put out by McGraw-Hill. In the class were quite a few barrio lads and lasses. Some of them had never seen the insides of a modern bank, had never stepped into a factory and I doubt if some of their parents had ever paid taxes to the government. Yet I taught them about long-run and short-run changes in the supply curve, about income determination and the ways a Central Bank controls the money supply. Was I doing the right thing? Were their parents doing the right thing when they sent their sons and daughters to a school where Samuelson's textbook was used?

That is the problem of culture and objectives. And in the Philippines this problem is acute.

THE ECONOMIC PROBLEM

It will be good at the outset to make a clearcut distinction between two similar concepts, "economics" and "finance" or the "economic problem" as distinct from a "financial problem". Both exist in relation to education. The financial problem in education is simply that of marshalling monetary resources in order to carry out an educational program. In the public school system we have the very real problem of persuading Congress to allocate the necessary funds for the operation of the system.

In the private school system it exists in the resistance of parents to contributing more to the education of their children. For example, the lady who boasts that her *terno* cost her P500 and complains that she has to pay P300 a year for the education of her daughter; or the business executive who grumbles that he has to pay P25.00 a month for the education of his boy (equivalent to P1.20 per class day) yet will disdain to lunch in a restaurant where they charge less than P6.00 for a sirloin steak.

The *economic* problem, though related, is different and more fundamental. The economist has a very precise meaning for the term "economic problem". He accepts certain resources as given. Let us call them 1, 2, 3 and 4. He assumes a clear-cut objective. Let us call it "A". He considered his problem to be purely that of disposing of and managing 1, 2, 3 and 4 to get the maximum degree or quantity of "A" possible. For him the economic problem is a problem of allocation—using the available resources for maximum benefit. The economic problem in education, then, is the use of the educational resources of the country in order to achieve the greatest degree of education possible. Our discussion must: 1) identify and estimate our educational resources; 2) explore their use; 3) reopen the question of objectives, this time not as a cultural problem, but as an aspect of the total economic problem.

Let us identify and estimate our educational resources. In the Philippines they are limited and poor. But the sad thing is that quite often we forget that certain resources are in fact educational resources.

There is little doubt that our educational resources are limited in quantity and poor in quality. There is no need to belabor the point here. Suffice it to indicate two items. First, on the point of quantity. The educational resource potential of a country will depend fundamentally on the national income of that country. In the Philippines as of 1958 our national income was P9,323 million, giving us a per capita income of P357.20. At the rate of P3.50 to the dollar this is approximately 5% of the per capita income of the United States. Of

the quality of our educational personnel let us simply take note of the observation of the UNESCO Survey Team, in paragraph 9 of their general conclusions: "Fewer than half of the teachers of the nation are qualified in terms of present standards, which are relatively low. Greater emphasis must be placed on the provision for more and better teacher education."

Considering the rather limited potential of the Philippines one would expect an all-out effort to use that potential to the full. We fail sadly in this. The problem is precisely that we have failed to identify which indeed are our educational resources. One of the educational traps into which we seem to have fallen is the equating of education with schooling, so that we tend to place ever increasing burdens on the already overburdened school system of the country.

How should we conceive of the school system? As the *sole* agent for all personal formation? Or should it be taken as a specialized agent doing what other agencies *cannot* do—not merely will not do? Should a school spend time teaching students "good manners and right conduct"? Should time be given indoctrinating children on what to eat, how and when to do it? Or should we not rather leave these basic life processes to the care of families?

Should the school endeavor to assume the total burden of vocational education? Certainly the simpler aspects of vocational education can be given at home. Must a boy be taught how to plant tomatoes at school, or can this be done at home? Perhaps the boy whose father cannot teach him how to do this, need not himself learn it.

Should the school system undertake on its own—without seeking the cooperation of industry—the massive program of training in the various trades? The writer has heard a former personnel manager of one of the biggest agro-industrial firms in the country say that his company preferred to employ the boy trained in an academic high school rather than the boy who had gone to a trade school. Are we preparing in our industrial courses the kind of men industry really needs? Since presumably the trade school is meant to train young men for

industry, should not industry be consulted and given a larger share in accomplishing the task?

In a very real sense all the resources of the country are, potentially at least, educational resources. And any resources employed for less useful purposes are *de jure* educational. They should be transferred from the less valid uses to the general educational endeavor.

The amount allocated by the government to educational purposes represents the biggest single item in the government budget. But this does not prove that the educational system is getting all that it can reasonably expect. Government policy is at the bottom of much of the difficulty. Thus, for example, there is a steady supply of dollar-consuming entertainment in Manila—from films to visiting performers. There is a serious amount of pornographic literature sold in some of our more respectable stores. Yet schools are finding it harder to obtain scientific equipment; and only too often a shipment of textbooks is delayed because the Central Bank has been slow in releasing dollars.

Much could be done to improve private education if private schools could get additional funds from sources other than tuition and fees. But this is effectively blocked by a fiscal policy which taxes such donations at both ends—that of the donor and the donee.

We may pass on to the question of the efficient use of our scarce resources. I have no categorical statements to make. However, there are certain fundamental questions I believe should be raised.

One of the most sacred tenets of our age is the need for literacy. No one will deny that literacy is good. However, I do not think it is valid to assume that literacy and education can be equated. Nor can we even assume that without literacy we cannot have education. The very best proof to the contrary is some of our old rural folk. Many of them cannot read, yet their speech is vivid and redolent of Balagtas, their thinking is solid, and their outlook on life positive, yet restrained and

orderly. They are educated illiterates. Are our halfhearted efforts at bringing to many of their children the power of the written word actually productive of education? Are these young ones, who have gone to school for two or three years, have learned to read, and have subsequently forgotten how to, better educated than their parents? We should think this over.

A pat reason every one puts forward for the decline in educational standards is the dropping of the seventh grade. It is generally assumed that a sure way of improving education is to prolong the schooling process. This quantitative assumption is certainly worth challenging. There is no doubt that two years of good schooling are better than two years of poor schooling. Therefore the assumption that the more schooling we give the more education we shall have is valid only where no economic considerations come in. However, working within the framework of poverty we probably would achieve more by stripping the schooling process of non-essentials and giving the essentials excellently.

In the concrete, would we not get better results by spending on an expanded program of teacher training what we would on the additional seventh grade? It certainly seems that six years under good teachers are infinitely better than seven under bad ones.

As a final confirmatory note may I add that many of our great men from Rizal to Recto had only nine years of general education previous to university studies: three years in grammar school and six years in college, with no "high school". The secret of their education was a well integrated curriculum and fine teachers.

The economist who finds that he is limited to resources 1, 2, 3 and 4 to produce as much of "A" as possible, may decide that the best way to maximize "A" is not to use all his resources to the production of "A" but to turn some of the resources available to the production of more resources: 5, 6, 7, 8, etc. Investment postpones the attainment of at least part of the objective, but in the long run it maximizes its at-

tainment. The same situation may apply with no little probability to the educational effort in the Philippines.

Although there is not the slightest doubt that resources could be shifted from less important uses to the national educational effort, one wonders whether it may not be equally true that some resources could be shifted away from schooling to direct production and thus in the long run achieve a higher level of education.

One of the basic reasons for the rather poor educational system of the country is the basic poverty of the people. This leads to low government income on the one hand, and on the other hand to the inability of the poor people to benefit more from the educational services offered by the government. The educational structure has an economic base, and the structure can only be as massive as the base will allow it to be. Perhaps if we lay stronger foundations we will erect a better educational structure in the end.

To illustrate. It is said that we train a large segment of our youth for unemployment. It is not only the products of the academic schools who end up unemployed—but the products of the trade school as well. The problem is not in the schools. The problem is in the basic shortage of capital and entrepreneurial spirit and ability. What if the government were to divert say ₱100,000,000 annually from the educational process into joint financing of industries? There would be fewer classes temporarily in the public school system but in time there would be more men working and able to support their children's education. There would be more taxes paid eventually to open more schools. To assess the net benefits of such a policy would require an authoritative econometric study; but such a study, I submit, is worthwhile and basic. There is an optimum point somewhere for allocating resources to education, beyond which the effects are regressive. Where is that point? We cannot blindly assume that the national budget automatically attains it every year.

I have made this suggestion at the risk of a seeming contradiction. I must clarify my position.

1) I *hold as a thesis* that there are many national expenditures that would be more justifiably employed for education.

2) I present as a *hypothesis to be verified* that in the *long run* we would have more education if a greater proportion of the national budget were allocated to economic development and less to schooling as such.

The economist approaches his problem with the assumption that his objectives are determined. *As an economist* he does not claim the function of setting the desired objectives. However, it is a function of the educator to set up objectives. It is very easy to see that the most efficient use of resources directed at the wrong objectives can be far more wasteful than the inefficient use of resources directed at the right objectives. We saw in our discussion in the first part of the paper how complex was the problem of objectives in any dynamic society—and all the more so in any society like the Philippines which is undergoing cultural change at rapid but uneven rates in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, objectives must be set and the Philippine educator must set them. How to set the objective is a question of policy.

THE POLITICAL PROBLEM

We have reviewed the problems that we face in the matter of educational objectives and in the manner of marshalling greater resources for our educational effort. In this section on policy we cannot propose an answer for every single question we have raised. All we can do is to examine the main lines of approach open to us in order to establish a system capable of meeting the problem of objectives and at the same time of drawing from our potential resources the maximum of educational output. There are two main approaches that a government may take in setting up its educational policy, as it faces the problem of cultural diversity within its boundaries and realizes the scarcity of its educational resources.

It may decide on centralization. It may choose to develop a monolithic culture within the country, steadily doing away with all cultural and intellectual diversity. 'In line with this

it may choose to gain control (direct or indirect) of all educational facilities thus allowing for the maximum amount of educational planning.

Or government may choose the opposite view. It may decide to allow for cultural diversity and intellectual freedom. It may allow the arts, the sciences, the customs of the people to develop freely and spontaneously, respecting the judgment and the ability of the citizen to meet the problems of the community with the appropriate social institutions, trusting the people to find for themselves the art forms, the music, the literature, the spiritual values which will express, interpret and satisfy its national soul most truly and most effectively.

In a similar fashion, for the marshalling of resources and their effective use it can depend not solely on close control and central planning but on the interest and the organizational potential of the community.

Which to choose?

The first consideration should be the political philosophy of the people. Educational policy, it would seem, should be in general harmony with the other political institutions of the country.

Without implying any approval, may I suggest that, should one start with the premise that the citizen exists for the state and that his life is principally ordered to the welfare of the state, it would naturally follow that the state should control culture, dictate thought, and at every turn be present to mold the institutions of the people. Only thus will it get the maximum service from the citizenry. To centralize political and economic control and to liberalize education would be to stimulate ideas and simultaneously to suppress them. This would be to father a volcano.

However, should a people hold as a major premise a person's natural right to his individual freedom, the logical conclusion and the appropriate psychological concomitant should be a system of educational freedom in an atmosphere of individual initiative.

Individual freedom implies the right to life, the right to live it, and the right to prepare for it according to one's conscience and to the free choices one may make in conformity with conscience. Individual freedom implies that the citizen, although subject to the state, is not ordered to the state, that he does not exist for the state. It implies rather that the state exists in order to help and benefit the individual, and principally to safeguard his individual freedom. The state, then, far from having a right to dictate to the individual how he is to form himself, and to parents how they are to form their children, is bound to respect the individual and family choices in education.

Since there is no need to prove to readers of this review which premise is correct, it should be quite evident that the appropriate educational policy is one that will respect individual choices and decisions.

We have considered the question thus far on the basis of principle. It will help now to discuss it pragmatically.

Let us assume a very well knit people with an extremely homogeneous society: which would be the practical approach here? If the culture is well-defined, with little diversity, a centralized agency dictating educational policy to maintain that culture should not find great difficulty in defining educational objectives suited to the whole country. To this extent it would not do great harm. The difficulty would come in adaptation. Bureaucracies are notoriously slow to meet new needs and problems. A centralized system of education would be rather tardy in tooling up to meet social changes.

On the other hand where a homogeneous and well-defined culture prevails, there is *no need* of a centralized body to identify the culture to be communicated. Private institutions would do this without difficulty. At the same time they would not be found wanting when the need to change should become apparent.

But the real test is a country of sharp social and cultural differences such as the Philippines. Here no single pattern of

education would fit all the people. What would be appropriate for one class and region would be hopelessly unsuitable for another. No amount of planning would solve the problem, unless the central body should decide to plan for all needs—quite an impossibility. The problem of course gets hopelessly compounded when we introduce the element of social and cultural changes. No staff has the omniscience to plan properly for circumstances such as these. Where diversity of culture and rapid social change are characteristic, there is need for great faith in the good judgment and the common sense of the people. Each group and each region, knowing best its own character, what it needs and what it wants, must define for itself its own educational objectives, and must develop its own means to meet its changing requirements.

Where educational resources are scarce, a highly centralized system of education will likewise fail to make the best use of resources. It can *command* service, it can tax resources, but it will fail to elicit the most valuable ingredient in the educational endeavor: the creative contributions of its educators and the enterprising cooperation of its leaders. The reason is simple: centralization and control may increase the total amount of service labor rendered, but it will always stifle the interest of the men capable of new ideas and of independent leadership.

But what of the Philippines? The American government, contrary to all of its traditions of liberty, and turning its back on the system of educational freedom that existed in America at the time and at present, designed for the Philippines a highly centralized educational system. Was this done in order to mold the little brown brother in the likeness of the big white brother as soon as possible? It will be hard to tell, and in any case, it is now only a matter of academic interest. But the tragedy is that the system has trapped many otherwise liberal administrators in such a tangle of bureaucracy that some have unknowingly succumbed to it, and others although realizing its dangers and its stultifying power seem nevertheless to have been helpless against it.

Thus, for example, the late Secretary Hernández, at the annual convention of the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities, July 23, 1955, said:

In this connection, may I suggest to this distinguished body a plan of action which I have been contemplating for some time now. May I suggest that the PACU, the CEAP, the ACSC, and similar other educational associations hold a joint convention in which the role of the government vis-a-vis the role of private social initiative in the educational field could be thoroughly examined for the purpose of arriving at some wise and acceptable plan of carrying out what we might call a gradual "bureaucratic de-control" of the private schools. For this project you can count on the full-hearted cooperation of the Department of Education.

And Secretary Lim while still in charge of the Department of Education, in a speech at the Manuel L. Quezon University, April 4, 1959, said:

The Department of Education is, in principle, in favor of a voluntary accreditation system among the different colleges and universities, not only because I believe that the best type of supervision is self-supervision—just as I believe that the best type of discipline is self-discipline—but also because I hold the view that no amount of government supervision can fully and completely do the work of education which is essentially creative. Initiative and resourcefulness on the part of educators should be encouraged in order to draw out the best in man. Helping build human personalities is a creative job which is engendered by freedom from unnecessary interference.

Furthermore, in his report on the shortcomings of the Philippine Educational System he criticized the very system he was heading for being "colonial" in its overcentralization, adding:

Regulated decentralization of education is the common policy in these democratic countries, which leads to the better utilization by the citizenry of the needs of the community life, and to stimulating maintenance of the best schools possible. Under this policy, better support is received from the local community.

And yet, in spite of these statements in favor of "bureaucratic decontrol", self-accreditation, and self-supervision, the Department of Education has not made one substantial concession in this regard. If anything, it has increased the degree of centralization by imposing the nation-wide examinations for fourth year high school.

Moreover, the UNESCO report in its general conclusions and recommendations has this to say: "Education in the Philippines is too highly centralized, there is need for a delegation to the provinces and the chartered cities of greater authority and responsibility for the management of schools."

To the statement of the UNESCO Survey Team may we add the further point that in the Philippines overcentralization is not only geographical but functional as well. Just as the public school system is run from Manila, and just as curriculum plans are laid out in Manila for the public school system, so are private schools directed and supervised from Manila and, what is worse, they are patterned after the public schools.

This last statement should not be taken as a condemnation of the public schools. It simply is a condemnation of the fundamental error that all schools should be alike. Since there exists within the country a marked divergence of needs, a marked divergence of talents, and substantive cultural contrasts, the assumption should always be in favor of differentiation rather than uniformity.

Are English, History, the social sciences needed by all the boys all over the Philippines to the same degree? Will they learn these subjects with the same ease? If this is not so, then why should the same number of hours for these subjects be prescribed for all? The Bureau of Private Schools prescribes a uniform curriculum with a small percentage of electives for all commerce courses, whether the college is operating in Manila or in Surigao. Whereas the Manila student may be quite proficient in English, may have a very good reading ability and may someday be able to use some knowledge of cost accounting, the average Surigao boy would profit more from thirty additional units in English and thirty less units in Accounting, Personnel Management and other such subjects for which he will have no earthly use. Yet the Surigao college would not be allowed this very practical divergence in curriculum. Is there for example, any *real* reason why our grade schools all over the country should have seven years? This is assuming that boys all over the country have the same cultural background, the same needs, the same average level of achievement.

Why should we not allow — in fact encourage — some high schools to experiment with a three-year program, others with a five-year program? Why must every educational change become national, without benefit of trial and experimentation?

A pertinent example is the 2-2 plan. It was prescribed for all schools, all over the country. The equipment was not available. The teachers were not trained. The guidance personnel needed simply did not exist. But the edict went forth and the 2-2 plan was imposed, without further planning, on all schools. Can we say that this was meeting our cultural needs wisely? Can we say that this nation-wide tinkering with the educational system was efficient? Is it using our educational resources for the maximum benefit of our young people?

Some years ago we shortened the grade school term from seven to six years. This too was a nation-wide change. A war broke out and disrupted our educational system. We emerged from the war dissatisfied with educational results. We blamed it on the missing seventh grade. The six-grade system never really had a chance. But without any studies worthy of scientific respect, without considering our lack of resources in men, buildings and books, we prescribed the seven grades once again, and we find ourselves today in the sad plight of not being able to implement government policy.

Changes in the educational system are necessary. They are bound to come. But changes are most effective when they come from the people; when they are gradual; when they have had the benefit of experimentation. There are two instruments for effecting this type of educational change: the private schools and the provincial divisions within the public school system. If individual private schools were allowed and encouraged to experiment, if the various provincial divisions were given the authority to effect basic curriculum changes, we would find out more quickly what changes are really effective, and we would be meeting our local needs more suitably. We would have a flexible educational system geared to face social and cultural changes with full respect for individual freedom and capable of making efficient use of the special resources of our schools both public and private.