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# What Are Schools For?\*

FRANCISCO ARANETA

**E**DUCATION is the process by which a person forms and shapes himself by cooperating with God's gifts so that his powers, physical, intellectual and moral, come to mature fulfillment. The educated man is the full man. Normally he has his body so developed and so disciplined that he is able and willing to do a full day's work. His mind is broad in its interests and vigorous in the search for truth. He is careful in the face of evidence. He knows when to doubt and when to accept something as certain. He is able to rise to great anger in the presence of great injustice. He is capable of great sorrow and pity when he sees human calamity. He can weep. Father Mulry, when he was teaching us the classics, used to say, "Count how many times those great big Greek heroes shed tears. A real he-man ought to weep when there is cause for weeping." And that is the point. A man's emotions should be in accord with reason; not inhibited, but controlled. And by the same token, if a man's emotions are attuned to reason he will have practical prudence and his choices and decisions will be those indicated by good judgment and inspired by grace.

Let us turn to a second fundamental question. Who will bring about this process of education? Who are the educators?

As we have seen, education is an eminently human thing. It is also an eminently *free* process. The first and indispensable

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\* This is the revised version of an address to the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, October 1962.

educator is the person himself being educated. Somebody committed a blunder of the first order when he called the student, the person in the process of education, the "educand", thus helping along the already widespread error that the student is the *passive* object of educational activity.

Teachers are, of course, the first witnesses to the truth that the student is the primary educator. How many times have your best lectures, your most carefully arranged lesson plans stagnated like swamp water in the sleepy, distracted and uninterested minds of your pupils? The most lucid explanation comes to naught if the listener does not *himself* elicit the ideas and judgments that constitute the explanation.

This does not mean, however, that education is an individual process. Tarzan growing up into a magnificent human specimen, combining ape-like prowess, British gentility and Christian nobility, all without human guidance, is for Grade School entertainment strictly and quite obviously. No, education is a *social* process, with society actively interested in assisting the growing boy or girl. Involved in this process are the family, the Church, the State, the community in general and the school. The role of all these social groups in education St. Thomas would describe as *instrumental*. They provide, or themselves are, the instruments which the young man must employ properly for his formation.

In this line-up the school occupies a peculiar position. Not only is its role instrumental in relation to the person being educated, but it is ministerial in relation to the other social entities interested in education. Its total concern is education, but it educates on behalf of family, Church, state and community. It must serve many masters, and from this capital fact arises the great practical problem of our schools, because one cannot serve many masters successfully unless one do so judiciously.

The modern family is under great social stress. Parents have accumulated a great many social obligations outside the home, and children are under the constant pressure of influences of all kinds from the world about them. The net result is that

parents depend more and more on the school to do their basic work in education for them. They count on us to teach their children everything from good manners and the social graces to the intimate details of sex. They expect us to counsel their children through personal difficulties of all kinds; to chaperone them at their parties; to prepare them for marriage. You all have heard at one time or another a parent say, "I have done my part in education, I have sent my boy to a Catholic School."

The government is concerned with communism, world peace, economic development, and Hispanic cultural ties. So in one fell swoop it wants us to train our students to abhor communism, love the United Nations, fight for democracy, be artisans, farmers, statesmen and entrepreneurs, and all with a good command of the Spanish language. The demands of the community can be quite unpredictable. It may expect schools to develop all kinds of talents: produce *sipa* players, Bayanihan dancers, basketball players of Olympic ability.

Schools for the most part have proved responsive to the demands of the other agencies, in fact eagerly responsive. And the tendency of some schools has been to keep acquiring a wider share of the total educational responsibility. Since schools are not the only agency of education, evidently theirs is a limited share of the total burden of education. The purpose of this paper is to propose a definition of our limited role in education, in contrast to the roles of the other agencies. There is of course no idea here that there is any inherent necessity to the proposed definition. A school may define its purposes and policies as it wishes, and obviously we all do that. If you think you should run a hair-dressing school, who can stop you? However, the definition that will be propounded is not an invention of the hour, something I personally have worked up for this occasion. It is a statement of a tradition that goes back to the cradle of our culture, and it has therefore the approval of long experience.

In general we might say that there have been two basic ways of conceiving the role of the school. If we may use a contemporary term to describe a somewhat ancient idea, one approach to the school has been that of life-adjustment. As

the term implies, the school's precise function is preparation for life in any or all its various aspects. The concept is simple and very accommodating. It places the school at the unreserved service of all the other agencies of education: family, state, community, and Church. It is willing to do anything for everybody. For this reason it is quite attractive and today rather popular. A second approach of the school problem is to limit the role of the school to something more precise, the development of the mind. Because this definition is indeed precise, it seems narrow, and for that reason it suffers today from a lack of acceptance and popularity.

Let us examine both approaches, both philosophies of education.

If you belong to the life-adjustment camp you hold that a school exists precisely to train for life, and, depending on the type of school, either for some aspect of life or life in general. You must also hold that training for any aspect of life is a legitimate function of a school, and you only regret that school life is not long enough to train the growing boy for more and more of the problems of life he is bound to encounter.

Implicitly you make the school a kind of instrument for solving all problems. Because some of our barrio parents have not seen a toothbrush, you believe the school must teach children how to brush their teeth. Because the Chinese control the retail trade of the Philippines, you heed the plea of government officials and announce that your school will offer courses in retail trade, or, more properly, *sari-sari* store keeping. You take pity on our exploited consumer and you advocate courses in cooperatives for our high schools. Because the Russians launched Sputnik before the Americans got a missile on a pad, you wonder whether physics should not begin in the grade school. The Philippines did badly in the Jakarta Games; you believe it is the neglected mission of our schools to improve athletic education. Because you hear of marital maladjustment among your friends, you rail at schools because they do not have courses in sex education. To prevent a Third World War you believe a primer should be written to explain the United Nations to our grade-school children. Since the Philippines needs

more dollars and tourism produces dollars, all modern and progressive schools should offer courses in tourism. You think this is a joke, but I did actually get an official suggestion on the subject.

This can go on and on. And unfortunately it does. The logical consequence of the life-adjustment position is that you have no norm for determining what is a valid activity for a school and what is not; and this for a very simple reason. You have accepted the responsibility for *all of education*; you have equated the school with life, and life is indefinitely broad. The end result of the life-adjustment approach is our present-day situation where we are *not* doing what we are supposed to do because we are *kept busy doing* what we are *not supposed* to do. The result is a confused, floundering and confessedly ineffective educational system.

Well, then, if the school is not meant to prepare for life, what is it supposed to do?

The truth is that a school *is* supposed to train for life. What else would it be doing otherwise? Nor will anyone deny that education is in fact a process of life-adjustment. Because a school must in fact prepare for life, however, it does not follow that its role should be *defined* in those terms. Because, very obviously, the definition is too unprecise to supply us with a basis for effective and discriminating policy.

If the life-adjustment formula is unsatisfactory, can we suggest something better? Before we give our answer I propose that we inquire into our beginnings. Let us go to early Greek education. Greek society was divided into slaves and free men. The slave did the work — menial work, that is, that required relatively little thinking. He was *told how to do* his job and he did it exactly that way. The free men governed the state, served in the army, managed farms, and in their leisure hours developed their minds.

The highest point in their intellectual development came when, having finished grammar, rhetoric and mathematics, they engaged in *dialectic*. Dialectic is the systematic inquiry into *what* and *why*, and it was for them the threshold of philosophy

and scientific knowledge. The studies that occupied the time and interest of the free man were known as "liberal studies," for the simple reason that they were the occupation of *free men*. The Greeks, who perhaps of the ancient pagans had the greatest appreciation of pure humanity, thought that these studies were intrinsically worthy of free men, and in truth they were. And since all men are free these are the studies worthy of *all men*.

Why?

Note the distinction made. The slave was taught *how*. The free man was taught *what* and *why*. The slave was taught *technique*; the free man learned by the use of his highest faculty the *causes of things*. After the slave was taught how—was given the technique—he had no freedom to use any other technique. First because he was not allowed to, secondly because he knew no other technique. The ability to follow a technique we share with animals. Birds can make beautiful nests, bees can make hives that are wonders of engineering. You can teach a dog to flush out a bird from the bush, track down a criminal or lead a blind man. You can even train fleas to dance in a circus. But you cannot teach animals *why*—you cannot teach them causes. Man of course must learn techniques; but knowledge of techniques is not what distinguishes *man as man*. It is the knowledge of *causes*, of the *what* and *why* of things and life, that opens for him the power of alternative choices, of *freedom*. These give to him the dignity of man.

Please note that as explained above the high point of the liberal education of the Greek citizen was not grammar or literature. It was dialectics as an approach to science and philosophy. Literature is important, but only because it gives us in concentrated tablets the vicarious experiences which helps to teach us the *what* and *why* of man. The factor that is crucial, that makes of knowledge truly human, is the knowledge of *essence*, of the nature of things, whether this knowledge be experimental or theoretical.

The Greek idea of education did not die with ancient Greece. The Roman took it up and, by the mediation of his

Empire, bequeathed it to the Christian world. It remained the ideal of the medieval universities. The Renaissance, which turned away from so much that pertained to the earlier period, embraced the ideals of Greek education with renewed enthusiasm. In this modern age, with educational philosophy and practice torn apart by conflicting demands, the perennial needs of the spirit of man continue to be felt. Businessman, scientist, professional, all come to realize that before one can become a practitioner, he should first be a human being.

I propose therefore that we reaffirm our age-old trust in liberal education and define as our objective *the development of the mind*. I am afraid, however, that although you all see the inconveniences involved in the life-adjustment formula, you will not all jump up to accept the development of the mind as an alternative solution.

In the first place quite a few may find mental development too narrow and restricted an objective for an institution that pretends to be educational, and therefore formative of the *whole man*.

Moreover I realize only too well that with this definition I have walked into the midst of a controversy that has roots in a philosophical question, long since mooted by Scotus and Aquinas, about the relative nobility and importance of intellect and will. In the present context some will argue that Catholic schools exist to make one a good Christian and that one is a good Christian by reason of his will, not his intellect. Obviously, some very holy persons can hardly be called intellectual, and some very highly intellectual persons are not only holy but even evil. It follows therefore that there is no necessary nexus between a developed intelligence and a good life. The ultimate object of education therefore must be the will, not the intellect. So the argument goes.

By my very definition of education given quite early in this paper, it is evident that I cannot deny that education must have for its object the *whole man*. And if the object of education is the whole man, then its object must also be the *good man*. That too is incontrovertible.



The solution to the problem lies in understanding what we are trying to do.

In the first place we are not trying to define the total object of the whole process which is education. Undoubtedly, the total object education is the *whole man*. Therefore not just his mind. But here we are not discussing what the object of *education* is, we are discussing the *precise and peculiar role of schools*. And I believe that we all must agree that there must be some differentiation of roles between the various agencies of education, and therefore a differentiation in the object to be attained.

The philosophers make various distinctions which are pertinent to the problem. Thus they make a distinction between the material and the formal object. Both your eyes and your tongue attain cognition of the whole banana. However your eyes do so through color and your tongue through taste. Whereas both give us knowledge of the whole object, each sense attains the object through a different characteristic of that object. Philosophers would call the whole banana the material object, and color and taste the formal objects respectively of eyes and tongue.

The theologian uses similar language with regard to our final destiny in heaven. Our supernatural end is union with God. But how are we united with God? By the *beatific vision*, by the direct contemplation of the Divine Being. So they speak of *God* as the *finis qui*, and the vision of God as the *finis quo*.

By analogy we can say that the material object or the *finis qui* of education must always be the *total man*. All agencies of education must conspire to develop the whole man. But their respective roles are differentiated by the special and particular goals, or the formal object, of their endeavors.

This is not the time to go into a disquisition on the contrasting roles of each agency. All we need to say for the present is that family, community and state endeavor to educate through informal means, that is, by simple experience, not necessarily intending to educate. Thus father and mother, by simply shar-

ing the goodness and harmony of their lives with their children, exercise a marvelous influence on their outlook and emotional temper and thus educate them.

The school on the other hand enters the educational process *explicitly*. The role of the school, therefore is that of reflection, of consideration, of systematization, of deliberate formation of values.

Whereas the community influences the young man to stay away from crime by an adverse reaction on the wrong-doer, and the state by punishing the criminal, the school must give the young man the norms for judging what is right and what is wrong, and the reasons why an act may be right or wrong. In the same manner, the Church leads the soul to a love of the Mass by the splendor of the liturgy; but to a large extent she must count on the school to give that soul the breadth and depth of understanding that is needed for a full human commitment to the Mass and to the Christian life that the Mass implies.

Examples need not be multiplied. The point should be clear. We adjust to life by living it, in our family, in our community, under the protective care of Church and State. But we must *understand* life rationally; this we do by sustained and systematic reflection; and for this, family, church, state and community have created the school. By this process of reflection, by the constant process of asking the "what" and "why" of life, the school develops the *mind* of the boy and fulfills its role.

One can very well see what a tragedy takes place when, without fully appreciating the extent of its responsibility, the school begins to slacken in the pursuit of its own goal—that of *understanding*—simply because it feels it must do for the growing boy what the other agencies of education cannot help but do in any case, or, in educational jargon, "provide meaningful experiences."

A deeper understanding of the point can be derived from an examination of the full scope of the achievement which is implied in the simple phrase "developing the mind."

I choose the word "mind" rather than "intellect" because of the special connotations of the two words. "Intellect" connotes a very precise function: *abstract cognition*. It stresses the *distinction* between the faculty of knowing and the faculty of choosing; between the faculty of *spiritual*, as against the faculties of *sense* cognition. The word "mind" on the contrary connotes the opposite. Rather than distinction, it connotes *nexus*, the operative linking of the faculties and their common *situs* in a simple, that is, non-composite soul. Thus when a mother says "I have a mind to spank the baby," we have the verbal expression of a judgment (intellect) moving the person to action (will) and suffused with exasperation (emotions).

When we think therefore of developing the mind we should recall that although we are developing the faculty of abstract cognition, we are not developing a faculty in cold isolation. For this faculty is perforce immersed in emotion and exerts continuous influence upon the will. And because of this, we have a faculty not just of speculative but of practical and moral judgment as well. I use the word "mind", therefore, recognizing in it the faculty for spiritual leadership in the inner self, and remembering that it is the intellect that in man must guide the will and manage the emotions, arousing or quieting them as need arises.

When we say, then, that the role of the school is to train the mind, we mean that the school must develop the speculative, the practical and the moral judgment of a person, developing that judgment so that it assumes ascendancy over will and emotions.

Very clearly, the development of the mind involves very much more than the development of a keen well-exercised intellect. It involves enrichment through cultural contacts. By "cultural" we mean to include the full range of human involvement, religious, philosophical, scientific, and artistic. It implies manifold discipline: tenacity, objectivity, precision both of thought and the expression of thought. It is incomplete without the capacity for deep human appreciation, therefore artistic as well as moral appreciation. Briefly, then, we may say that the developed mind is one that can elicit the proper response in

the face of the true and the false, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly.

In effect, therefore, the schools will contribute towards training the whole man—and this very effectively—by approaching man's personality through the centric faculty of the mind, and concentrating upon it. Whereas a diffusion of effort, motivated by the perverse idea that schools are little life-laboratories where no part of man's make-up must be forgotten, ends up in an equal diffusion of effect. Instead of having a strong, rich personality powered by a strong, rich mind, our graduates will be nondescript, "well-adjusted" (?) persons who have no conflicts because they have no convictions, and who get along with everybody because they are quite incapable of forming *their own opinion*.

It should be quite clear too that by concentrating on the mind the schools are most effective in the development not only of the learned man but of the *good* man as well.

In the first place, we should recall that goodness is in the final analysis a matter of personal choice, and choices are always going to be free acts welling out of the *will*, which can only be influenced, not determined from the outside—not even by the sister faculties of cognition.

The best thing therefore that a school can do for the "formation" of the will is to equip a person with a well-lit, honest mind, utterly detached and humble in the face of evidence, sensitively aware of moral values and deeply affected by beauty, and especially *spiritual* beauty.

The school has a very important role in relationship to virtue, but a very precise role. As we know from theology, grace builds on nature. It is the natural man that is to be infused with grace, and grace will not change nature—it will simply elevate it. This role of the school therefore is the preparation of the natural vessel that is to be the recipient of grace, cultivating in the person the aptitude, the natural predisposition and the very longing for grace. Grace can penetrate any heart and will. It is not hard to see that a person whose mind has been enriched by the reading of great poetry would

be more sensitive and responsive to the calls of grace than one whose literary horizon has not extended beyond *Superman Comics*.

We must now attend to the practical application of these general ideas to our school system. Here again a historical examination will be of great help.

Our present schools as a national system are a direct importation from the United States. They have European influences in so far as these have been brought in by the religious orders and insofar as American schools were previously influenced by European schools.

If you want to be charitable you can say that the characteristic of the American school is compromise, which is the practical democratic solution. If you want to be uncharitable you can call it schizophrenia. The point is that the Renaissance and post-Renaissance schools were aristocratic schools—schools for the elite. Their objectives were liberal and their curricula were severe, guided strictly by the liberal norm. The early American colleges were patterned along the same lines. To prepare for college or university work, preparatory schools were established in both Europe and America with the sole purpose of preparing young students for higher studies. Hence these preparatory schools also were oriented towards a liberal education.

The first schools for the masses appeared in Germany in the form of the *Volkschule*. In the United States, Benjamin Franklin came up with the academy, a type of school that allowed in its curriculum almost every conceivable subject. In effect here we have the life-adjustment philosophy in operation. In the United States, for a while, the two types of lower school continued, the preparatory school preparing for college and the academy preparing for life. But this did not continue for long. Soon, the academies, which were private and which in fact catered to the richer families, began to assume the role of college preparation as well, and became therefore an academic compromise.

In 1821 the first public schools appeared. These were meant to be terminal, preparing directly for life. But in time

they too extended their role to include preparation for college. The American high school therefore as it was transplanted to the Philippines was the dual-purpose school: aimed at preparing for college and preparing directly for life. It is simultaneously a preparatory school and a terminal school, simultaneously a liberal school and a life-adjustment school.

We all know the sad result. We study English grammar in the grade school, we study it in high school, we study it in college; but we never learn it, really. We take elementary physics in high school, and then we proceed to forget what we learned, because in any case in college we shall renew acquaintance with elementary physics. We take algebra and geometry in high school; but if you go on to engineering you must do "Math O", which is a review of high-school math, because although you took high-school math and you graduated from high school the Bureau of Private Schools is quite certain you really never learnt your math in the first place.

You see if you are not sure whether you are preparing for college or preparing for life, whether you are supposed to enrich your mind or merely prepare to enrich your pocketbook, you end up prepared for neither college nor life, enriched in neither mind nor pocketbook.

Since the system of education imposed on us by the Department of Education is a compromise which, by trying to satisfy many ends, succeeds poorly in all, our first task must be to restore unity of purpose to our school system. Therefore let us simply decide that no matter what the philosophy of education might have been that brought us to our present pass, we shall restore in our schools the tried concepts of liberal education, and orient our efforts to developing the mind. In our educational ladder we distinguish four steps, the grade school, the high school, college, and professional (and graduate) schools. The heart of this training is really in the undergraduate college. We must restore our colleges as true liberal arts colleges, structured and oriented towards giving the young man and woman the cultural heritage of the 20th Century.

Our grade schools and high schools we must conceive as college preparatory schools. With Newman let us simply hold that the best preparation for life is the development of the mind. What is needed is careful programming so that we do not do in high school what really is college work. There is nothing more pernicious in education, nothing that so stultifies the mind as the growing practice of taking college matter and preparing it in capsule form, in formulas and simplifications that can only mislead, for grade school consumption—all in the interests of “preparing for life.”

More important still, we should make up our minds that what we do in high school will be done in such a way that it will never again have to be done in college. Thus I think that mastery of English grammar and reading facility should be modest yet very practical goals for the Philippine high school. Achievement of this one objective would do more for Philippine college education than any other thing one can think of.

Since the Department of Education imposes upon us, even on our academic high schools, courses for vocational preparation, we should do two things. First, as a body we must try to have this unreasonable imposition removed. Secondly, as long as the imposition remains, let us set up our vocational courses so that they are intimately connected with our academic subjects, and naturally flow from them. Thus, I would suggest that gardening, if it is taught, should be taught in conjunction with, and as a practical application of, courses in botany. Other ideas of similar nature will promptly suggest themselves.

Let us not become directly concerned with the needs of the economy in our academic high schools. If industry needs technical workers, and if we decide that we should attend to this need, then let us take care of the matter in schools equipped, prepared and explicitly oriented to this task.

Finally, let us not forget that our professional schools must continue to be true centers of learning. Let us not bring university education down to the level of the technical school. Our medical schools should not become glorified centers of pharmaceutical information, where the latest prescription is taught.

We must teach fundamentals, so that our doctors will know why they do what they are doing, so that they will know how to pioneer and search for new remedies. Let us not teach in our chemistry courses simply how to make soap or paint or floor wax. Let us teach them basic structures, so that they will *understand* how the things around us are put together. Thus they will be able to create new formulas, not just follow the ancient ones that come from the ageing lecture notes of the chemistry instructor.

From the first year of school to the last and final effort before the doctorate degree, from kindergarten to university, the school has one basic commitment, and that is to the mind. Let us not assume a host of other commitments when very clearly we have not been able to fulfill even this first one with honor and with pride.