

# Revised Philippine Educational Program

By Pedro T. Orata

THE school year 1957-58 marks a turning point in the development of the Philippine educational system. The "Revised Philippine Educational Program" — primary and secondary — will be implemented beginning this school year. There are many features of the new plan which bear commenting upon, but for this article, I shall confine myself to only a few of them.

But first, I wish to emphasize that any adverse comment that I might offer is given, not in the spirit of disagreement necessarily with the distinguished groups or committees and the Board of National Education who made the revision of the old system, but more in the spirit of enquiry to promote further discussion on some of the controversial features of the plan.

In the first place, there seemed not to have been enough participation by laymen and the teaching profession both in the critical evaluation of the old system and in the making of the revised programme. What seems to be the amount of teacher participation is in the nature of raising questions "which they may have about it or any problems which they believe will arise as a result of the implementation of the program." (BPS Circular No. 3, s. 1957) That is, not in the planning, itself, but in using the ready-made plan.

This is rather embarrassing because since the war there has been an effort to decentralize the educational system, meaning to give the "field" a much wider scope for helping in planning the work. The world over today, if I read the literature correctly, not only in the United States but in Canada, New Zealand, Burma, India, Costa Rica (I have evidence for 47 countries in all regions of the world, large or small, developed and under-developed) is there a definite trend toward involving teachers and representative laymen in curriculum revision and development. The fact is that, especially since 1950, the Philippines have led in such a trend, and more recently the establishment of curriculum laboratories and the widespread use of curriculum seminars had given the impression that the Philippines was way ahead in this movement. It was therefore surprising that the revised plan was issued within a year after the various

committees and the Board of National Education started working on it.

Second, the inclusion of Work Education among the six major categories in the elementary school curriculum is very timely, and needs no further comment except to point out that in the implementation of this objective two features should be emphasized: 1) relating this aspect of the programme and the other four, and 2) the constant need of follow-up to make sure that the habits of work are established on a functional basis rather than on largely verbal or theoretical basis, as it has been the case too often when, for example, gardening was more for grade than for the produce raised.

Third, I wish to comment more intensively on the "two-two plan" for the high school. The plan, as I understand it, is designed to separate the college-minded and the vocationally-inclined students through a system of individual guidance of students. The experiment in Bayambang, according to a recent report (Handbook, Bayambang High School, 1957-58, p. 9), seemed to show that there is a fair chance for the scheme to work as shown by the fact that the 195 seniors in 1956-57 chose the major fields as follows: Vocational (Agriculture 42, Business 45, Home Economics 48, Industrial Arts 23), or a total of 158, College Preparatory 37. I have no information about the two other experimental high schools, but unless the mentality of the students have changed considerably, I keep my fingers crossed as to the likelihood that, all over the Philippines, a similar distribution will be obtained.

The first question that I have, besides this, is how adequate is the supply of competent guidance workers to be assigned to more than 1,500 high schools (353 public and 1,228 private — figures for 1953-54), a large number of which will require more than one such workers. To be effective the guidance should be largely individual, and a high school with 500 students in the first and second years should have at least five guidance workers to work according to the theory — 100 students per guidance worker. But, the juniors and seniors need guidance, too, although not to the same extent. The total enrollment in the secondary course in 1954-55 was over 600,000. At

the rate of 100 students per guidance worker, we should need 6,000. Even if you reduce that to 2,000 where are we going to get them?

The next question is, what would be the basis of the guidance to be provided? Have we materials for the guidance workers to use — occupational surveys and pamphlets, studies and records of individual occupations in the Philippines? Before the war there were a few vocational leaflets prepared by an American working in the U.P., I believe, but since then I have seen no such leaflets. What about occupational surveys and follow-up studies? Without such material — printed and available in sufficient number of copies for the 1,500 high schools — guidance will be mostly talk. It will not work.

The third question is, how many additional teachers do we need for the various vocational fields who not only possess the theoretical professional qualifications, but above all, who are competent practitioners in their fields of specialization? The trouble with much vocational training in our high schools today is that it is mostly in the lesson plan of the teacher and it is seldom translated into work habits and skills. This is why, as the late President Magsaysay observed, high school and even vocational school poultries and piggeries are either empty or they are occupied by emaciated chickens and pigs and that the vegetable gardens have more weeds than vegetables. Many a vocational teacher in our schools today teach the wrong things about work, because they have no competence in doing the work required or else they are just “teachers” not “trainers” in the liberal sense of the term.

The fourth question is, how much equipment is there available in the 1,500 high schools that the students will need to use in the various vocational fields? And, how much equipment of the kind that are realistic and practical for the kinds of communities in which the students will live after graduation from high school, granting that half or more of them will not continue their studies in college or in technical schools? The few high schools that I know in Pangasinan, which is not a poor province, have very little equipment.

Fifth, if the vocational graduates can, according to Dr. Isidro, continue in college or university just as the graduates of the college-preparatory course, what is the separation all about in the third and fourth years? This is a feature that I do not understand. Of course, I could see that most of the students, regardless of the course they choose will aim at the college, but why the expectation that, “properly guided,” they will not?

Sixth, given that the vocational course will not be specialized — specialization being reserved for the technical schools and colleges — and granting that one-half or more of the students will choose the vocational course and continue to specialize, is there any assurance that they will have appropriate jobs after they have specialized? We seem all to want vocational and technical schools, but how many graduates of such schools are employed? The fact that the Department of Public Works had to issue a circular to district engineers requiring them to give preference to vocational graduates in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs is clear evidence that what is lacking is not trained manpower but the opportunity to use the training.

Once again, we have gone much too fast, first, in revising the education system, and second, in the implementation of the revised plan. In France, as I have pointed out — and this is now true in England — it took three years to revise the educational system and five years to prepare for its implementation. What should ordinarily take five to ten years in Europe we do in less than one year. Either they are too slow in Europe or we are in too much hurry, and as result we miss the bus. I hope I am wrong, but it cannot be right both ways!

If the plan is strictly enforced, as many as ninety per cent of the high schools — public and private — might have to be closed. Even before the plan went into effect, there has been a lot of talk in both high and low places that, for lack of funds, many public high schools should be closed.<sup>1</sup> So, once more, we will solve the problem by doing away with the situation that gave rise to it, that is, to close the high schools. The operation will be successful, but the patient dies.

That the Department of Education has ordered the slowing down by two years the full effectivity of the plan is an indication that even in the minds of the ones that made the plan it is not feasible, at least to that extent. But delaying is not going to make things right that were wrong in the first place. I wonder how many high schools have enough guidance workers to take care of at least 200,000 freshmen who must start thinking whether to take the vocational or the college preparatory course in June 1959, and on what are such workers basing their advising.

What are we to do in midstream, as it were, since the plan is already supposed to have started last June? In the circumstances, the best that I can suggest at the moment is **indefinite moratorium**. We have gone one step already in postponing the effectivity of the plan. We can go further and indefinitely, while we take time to think things over now that we have been confronted with the hard realities — lack

<sup>1</sup> Neil T. Altre. “The Crisis in the Public High Schools,” *Weekly Women’s Magazine*, 25 January 1957, pp. 24-26, “Public High Schools Foreclosure as Yearly Fund Deficit Accumulates,” *Manila Daily Bulletin*, 20 June 1957, p. 2.

of funds, no guidance workers to hire even if we had all the money that we needed, no guidance material, no equipment or specialized and competent (meaning ones who have had both the training and the experience on jobs) vocational teachers, and no assurance that the students, assuming that they are guided well, will choose according to abilities and aptitudes. And, what is to be done with those who will not listen to advice?

Going ahead with the plan and thinking about the difficulties has been our traditional way of educational reform. Look back to the Educational Act of 1940, the undesirable effects of which cannot be outlived for another generation, the Rizal Act, the compulsory teaching of Spanish in high school and college, the adoption of the vernacular as language of instruction in the first two grades, to name only a few. In every case we did not think enough of the consequences before making the final decision, and we started sooner — much sooner — than we were ready with teachers, teaching materials, and money with which to provide these.

It might be suggested that the next educational reform will be the reform of methods of educational reform, and I can predict that that would be one reform that we can put into effect tomorrow. And,

as I suggested, the two-two plan could accordingly be postponed indefinitely.

Or, if we wanted a face-saving device, I would suggest that the application of the plan be made only in high schools which are ready. That would really be a test. If the plan has merits, it should be adopted as quickly as possible; if it does not, the sooner it is forgotten the better for all concerned. This is not saying that we will let well enough alone. We must re-examine the high-school situation, get all the facts and factors in the open, think through plans that will work, try them out in adequate number of high schools, examine the results, modify the plan, and then ask teachers, parents, and students if they are willing to go on with it — they are the ones to teach, support, and study under, the plan.

In other words, let the plan (two-two) be a privilege to have, not an imposition upon unready schools. In this case, the Department of Education should be very strict in enforcing all the requirements. In four or five years, if the plan will really work as it is thought it will, then that will be soon enough to put it into full operation. By European and American standards, that will even be too soon. But we can try, wait, and see. This is better than closing the high schools that cannot afford the plan, which will be equivalent to jumping from the frying pan into the fire.