

Leadership In Philippine Education

By Isabelo Tupas

WHENEVER I think of leadership in Philippine education, I am always confronted by the question as to whether or not such leadership exists or ever existed at all. My preoccupation in this matter is aggravated by the fact that Filipino students of education know that in Europe and even in some countries in Southeast Asia, but particularly in the U.S., there have been outstanding educators and educational thinkers who have influenced, if not shaped, educational thought, thereby establishing for themselves the position of educational leadership in their respective countries or regions.

Searching the history of education, we recall Comenius, Joseph Lancaster, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Rousseau, and Maria Montessori among others in Europe whose names are familiar to education students. In modern times there are those whose names have become educational polestars, like Tagore and Gandhi of India; like Horace Mann, Charles Eliot, Booker T. Washington, Kilpatrick, Dewey, and Robert Hutchins — among the Americans, one of whom was born a slave. These men, equally well known to us, at least by name, taught and preached in their times and inspired political revolutions or social reforms that brought about new areas in their respective countries. This was not all. The ideas propelled by these individuals broke down national boundaries and touched, if not quickened, the life of the rest of the world.

Different authorities define leadership with various connotations, some calling it a process, others calling it a force. In the light of the preceding observation, let us use a definition which comprehends both connotations, this one by Haiman which defines leadership as "that process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences, or controls the thoughts, feelings or behavior of other human beings. This influence may be exerted through the medium of his works — his books, his paintings, his inventions — or it may be exerted through face to face contact."¹

Under this definition, educational leadership involves four factors, namely (a) a person, (b) a purpose or a problem, (c) a following in a field of action, and (d) a goal. While these elements are more

or less self-explanatory and are present in other fields of leadership, they have implications quite unique in the discipline of educational leadership and therefore need some elaboration. An educational leader has a cause that is the product of a problem or an inspiration arising from a situation or condition of the time. The cause cannot be intermittent but one that is fundamentally ever present as if it were a chronic ailment because every such case essentially arises from social change, if not altogether from a social evil. There is no leadership in education that is not sensitive to a cause; and the leadership does not cease until the cause is resolved and the condition improved or the social ill remedied. This leadership cannot lie in a group but must repose in and emanate from an individual who belongs to an institution or a group which serves as his seed bed or experimental field and later the immediate disseminator of his influence. While the individual serves as the power nucleus, it is necessary that there be a certain group of potential listeners and followers that are directly or indirectly related to him either as colleagues and/or as co-professionals. The area served by the group outside the nucleus constitutes the leader's potential field of action. We are going to add to this observation the condition that the leadership with which we are concerned is leadership in a democracy whose complement is freedom as against leadership in an autocracy or police state whose complements are dominance and submission.

Applying this definition of leadership to the educational field in our country, let us recall if only quite briefly some Filipinos who in various degrees stimulated Philippine education. All at once Dr. Jose Rizal, though not belonging in this era, comes first to my mind. He has been referred to quite often in the Philippine public schools as a forerunner of the Philippine concept of community education and community improvement that now engage our attention. In addition to this, it seems to be the Philippine consensus that Rizal was the father of Filipinism which has been reinterpreted in our time by Rafael Palma, Jorge Bocobo, Francisco Benitez, Camilo Osias, and Segundo Infantado. These men were outstanding in the firmament of Philippine education. Having worked with Bocobo, Osias, Benitez, and Infantado, I wish

¹ Franklin S. Haiman, *Group Leadership and Democratic Action*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1952, p. 4.

to express a personal opinion that these men gave Philippine education not only an indigenous substance and color, but also a direction that was truly Filipino.

I would like to devote a few words to some Filipinos who did not serve in the Department of Education but have stimulated educational thinking in the country. I have in mind Mr. Francisco Dalupan, President of the University of the East, and Dr. Jose P. Laurel, Sr., Senator and Chancellor of the Lyceum. Quite recently President Dalupan expressed certain ideas on higher education in the Philippines which were generally interpreted as a preference for an emphasis on the humanities rather than on the practical or professional courses. This could be a good cause to promote but while it deserves serious consideration, the idea seems to have fallen on barren soil. On the other hand, Dr. Jose P. Laurel has continually been for moral education, as one may read in his monographs, *Forces That Make a Nation Great* and *Bread and Freedom*.

The foregoing list of contributors to educational thinking in the Philippines is by no means complete. Presidents of government and private universities, past and present, secretaries of education, directors, deans of private schools, and public school superintendents have all been equally substantial contributors to the educational progress of the Philippines. But I need not mention their specific contributions, great as they are, much less essay an evaluation of all outstanding Filipino educators because it is not my purpose to do so. I took a little time to name these educators in order to supply the basis for an answer to the question of whether or not educational leadership as explained above exists or ever existed at all in the Philippines.

I would like to advance the opinion that there have been no truly great educational movements in the Philippines like those inspired and introduced by the foreign educators I have already mentioned. The Philippine Public School System could be such a movement because it is the first of its kind in the country, the like of which has not been known in Asia. The system is not a product, however, of any one Filipino educational thinker, although such a popular system has been envisaged by Dr. Rizal. Many minds, both American and Filipino, contributed to this system which, paraphrasing the Monroe Report, was the boldest experiment ever conducted in the building of a democratic nation.

I believe that our educational leadership is still in the exploratory stage. Half a century of exploration is still too short a time to produce a leadership that can stand at par with that of Europe or America. It should be noted that leadership in these countries had been the product of a cultural climate that had been developing for very many years in the past. More than the need for an institution that can serve as a mouthpiece of educational leadership, more than

the existence of institutional and professional followership, educational leadership in the Philippines in order to attain stature if not reknown needs: first a political democracy with all its guarantees of freedom and free flow of ideas; secondly, a cultural maturity that prizes and promotes a well-established value system; and thirdly, the projection of a cause that is inherently a product of a social problem.

It would seem from this that time is the prerequisite element in the rise of educational leadership in the Philippines and by this I mean not necessarily timeliness but cultural maturity as the accretion of a long period of time and its corresponding experience.

It is in the more specific fields of education that we are in search of educational leadership. We expect this leadership to manifest itself continuously and not intermittently, and for a cause or mission which would make a distinct if not a unique contribution to educational thought in the Philippines and thus give rise to reforms in the concept of education that is truly Filipino. In the political field it is said that our constitution is the expression of the will and genius of the Filipino people. Can not the same will and genius make themselves manifest in Philippine education? Why should they not when Philippine education is for the Filipinos, of the Filipinos, and by the Filipinos. This is the line of thought which Filipino educational thinkers should pursue and exploit to the utmost. The Filipinism of Osias is along this line; so is the Philippine cultural renaissance of Bocobo, and Laurel's moral concept which I believe stems from the taproots of the mores of the Filipino family, whose moral virtues constitute our rock of ages.

The Philippine Community School, which is the product of contemporary times — our political emancipation and maturing social consciousness — is of a different vein. While the ideas had its origin in the United States, the Philippine concept, inspired as it was by Philippine conditions, is considered indigenous. After the war, conditions were so deplorable that the public school authorities became appalled at the socio-economic-cultural lag of the masses. From this bitter realization was born the belief that the common school should be used as an instrument of social reconstruction of which no other school system in the world has made a similar claim. Thus was born the concept of the community school movement in the Philippines.

The Philippine community school, however, is still in search of leadership. The leadership should reside in an individual who will serve not only as the power nucleus but also as the interpreter of its adherents. Such a leader is one who can synthesize the community school concept with Filipinism as the base and moral character as the common denominator, one who can draw from this synthesis the answer to the pressing challenge of living usefully, freely, abundantly, and securely in this seemingly chaotic world.