

ACROSS EDUCATIONAL FRONTIERS-II

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2. *Literacy Plus*

Unesco's programme of fundamental and adult education is not without pertinence to the Philippines as some people are wont to believe. First, because it is not limited to so-called under-developed areas, like Africa, China and India; furthermore, even if it were, many parts of the Philippines are under-developed. Second, Unesco concerns itself as well with under-privileged peoples in well-developed cities and industrialized countries—London, New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, for instance, where the slum districts are, are in many respects worse than many barrios in the Philippines. We have our slums in Manila—Tondo, Sampaloc, even Santa Cruz, where laborers are concentrated without the benefit of sewage disposal. These districts are hot-beds of subversive ideologies. Fundamental Education has great pertinence to these areas.

Then, too, there is the fact that our country is 75% rural, where the modern facilities of sanitation, travel and recreation are either absent or inadequate. It is in these areas where Unesco's programme of Fundamental Education has the greatest potential value. Some of us, naturally proud of our accomplishments, would not want to classify our country with parts of China, Africa, and India. The fact remains that we need similar assistance that these places do if we are to keep up with social progress in industrialized countries of the world.

It is well that we study the

educational procedures now in process of being developed by Unesco in its pilot and associated projects in South and Central America, in the Far East in China, in Africa, and soon in India. One such project is located in Viani, Colombia. The community of Viani is situated in a typical area of the Andes. It has a population of about 6,000 and comprises an area of 7,500 hectares. It is located in the upper limit of the coffee belt. The principal crops are coffee, corn, yuca, anise, bananas and sugar cane. All farming operations are performed by hand.

After centuries of wear and tear, the soil of Viani is on the way towards complete exhaustion. The wearing out process goes on constantly, and the helpless farmers feel more and more insecure as they find no means of preventing their soil from being eroded away. The salvation of the people of Viani, as is indeed the salvation of our own farmers, is soil conservation and particularly effective control and prevention of soil erosion. Dr. Mariano Alicante, Philippine soil conservationist, has told us that it is also our own problem.

At the request of the Colombian Government, Unesco sent to Viani, in early March of last year a young and energetic soil conservationist, Mr. Patricio Sanchez, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Mr. Sanchez went on in his work sensibly and systematically, bearing in mind that soil conservation is only one of the means towards the far more significant problem of human conservation.

In his work, therefore, Mr. Sanchez took the following steps:

First, he conducted a series of conferences with the farmers of Viani, with a view to leading them to realize the magnitude of the problem and to planning with them practical steps which they, themselves, can follow to deal with their worst enemy—soil erosion.

Second, he held similar discussions with the school teachers in order to lead them to see the educational problems involved and to help them relate soil conservation with the school curriculum from the first grade up.

Third, Mr. Sanchez organized the youth out of school—boys and girls—in order to show to them that their future is tied up with soil conservation and that it was up to them what they could plan to deal with it in a scientific manner.

Several months of such a procedure is bearing very encouraging results. Everybody in Viani is aware of the problem and determined to do his bit to deal with it. The job is not finished, by any means. In fact, it will take years to achieve Unesco's objectives. But the plan is there if we wish to study it for what it may be worth to our barrio folks in the Philippines.

Fortunately, we have in the Malabo project of Silliman University a similar attempt in the Philippines. As Dr. Arthur L. Carson, President of Silliman, said, "The Malabo project represents our most concrete experiment at Silliman in connection with the 'Community School' idea." This project is described in a five-page paper by Mrs. Edith Carson who, with Dr. Carson, has sponsored the project since the beginning.

Briefly, the following constitute the main features of the programme.

The project started as a relief measure after the war, and it soon developed into what is now known as the Malabo Community Center, or Centro sa Ka-us-wagan (Center of Progress). With it is an experimental school which serves both as a community center for the mountain people. But interest in Malabo started in 1941, really, when Silliman University was looking for an evacuation center to which the records of the University could be transferred. During the occupation the people built a school and two Silliman students taught there. The school was later burned.

After the war in which a large proportion of the community had died of malaria, the survivors were destitute and suffering from malnutrition. When the barrio had begun to recuperate a little from the ravages of war, two women from Malabo came to Dumaguete to ask that the school be reopened. A meeting of the entire community was held in 1947. "At that time the parents unanimously expressed their desire for a school similar to the one carried on during the war and volunteered to furnish all the materials for the building and to be responsible for its reconstruction and repair."

A community organization called Union of Progress (Paghiusa sa Pagpauasug) was formed which, since then, has been meeting once a month. In the meetings the members are consulted about the programme of the school and of the community center. As now conceived, the programme of the Community Center and the school programme are integrated, specifically designed to meet the

needs of the community as a whole. As Mrs. Carson points out: "It follows the educational philosophy that school, home, and community should be integrated into one program toward accepted goals of enlightenment and improvement. Young and old have equal opportunities. The curriculum is broad and elastic. In order to secure time for community activities, it has been necessary to sacrifice some elements of formal instruction for children. The name 'Community Center' is used, therefore, rather than 'school', although the project is essentially one of education." (The Malabo Community Center, by Edith Carson, January 1950. 5 pages, mimeog.)

The programme attempts to work along the following lines:

- I. *Education*
 - a. Classes in the tool subjects
 - b. Literacy classes for adults and out-of-school youth
- II. *Health*
 - a. First-aid dispensary and hospitalization for needy cases.
- III. *Home-making*
 - a. Foods
 - b. Sewing
- IV. *Economics*
 - a. Agriculture
 - b. Home industries
 - c. Co-operative organizations
- V. *Character Building*
 - a. Citizenship
 - b. Recreation
 - c. Religion

As a part of the programme of the center, the small children go to school for half a day. "The time devoted to study is in accordance with the wishes of the parents who want their children to have an education but need them half a day for the various tasks of the mountain community . . .

The older girls of the community work at home in the morning and study in the afternoon. They are continuing with the tool subjects but have more time devoted to classes in vocational arts such as sewing and cooking."

Then there is the work with young men and adults who attend evening classes. They are interested in improving their methods of working in the farm and in advancing their knowledge of human affairs. The literacy class for adults has attracted much attention. During the first year there were eleven members. "This year, speaking of 1949, thirty-eight went to the municipal center to cast their votes."

What is happening in Viani, Colombia among the six thousand inhabitants of that Andes village, and in the mountain barrio of Malabo in Oriental Negros among fifty-two families, can happen and should happen in all the thousands of rural communities and among millions of families in the parts of the Philippines, Thailand, Burma, China, India, South America, United States, and Europe, where civilization is still at a very low stage—where ignorance and illiteracy, poverty, disease and prejudice and hatred predominate. Fortunately for us in the Philippines, the problem of fundamental and adult education for the masses of our rural folks will soon be the object of intensive study as a result of Unesco's sending to the Philippines, to follow up the recommendations of the Unesco Mission, an expert in this field from Mexico who is familiar with the workings of the cultural missions which have done much to ameliorate the economic and social conditions of the people of that country.