

- Another idea advocated by a prominent Filipino educator is here presented for the advancement of national education.

WHY BARRIO HIGH SCHOOLS?

According to the latest census figures, the average educational attainment of the Filipino is the equivalent of Grade Five, by Philippine standards. Compared with American or European standards, this is Grade Three. This is far below the requirements of functional literacy.

The reasons for this low attainment are simple enough. Most of our people — that is 80% of them — live in the barrios where the highest educational level is Grade Six. Furthermore, for various reasons, a large percentage of the children who start in the first grade stop before completing the elementary course. Only 5 out of 40 graduating from a barrio elementary school can continue to high school, leaving 35 with only Grade VI education.

Efforts have been made to raise the level of compulsory schooling to the completion of

the elementary course, but without result. The fact is that the Government cannot even provide the necessary textbooks for the four grades of compulsory schooling.

Similar efforts have been made to restore the seventh grade, but again, for financial reasons, the sixth grade remains as the upper limit of the elementary course. There is no prospect of any change in the foreseeable future, which means that the children in the barrios are doomed to ignorance and illiteracy and (for many of them) to lawlessness.

The Karachi Plan, of which the Philippines is a signatory power, envisages that, within a short time, compulsory schooling be raised to the completion of the eighth grade. But again, how can the Philippines carry out the plan, considering that it cannot even enforce the present constitutional requirement of

four grades of schooling for every child?

The question is not whether we should have barrio high schools, but whether we can do without them, now that it has been shown that they work even better than expected. Who could have expected 450 of them this year, the third year after the movement started? The fact is that quite frankly I myself wonder why there are that many now, enrolling 36,000 students in 43 of the 54 provinces and in half a dozen cities.

On second thought, one should not really wonder why there are that many, but why no one had thought of the idea earlier than 1962 — for that was the time the idea occurred to us. It took two years to convince the powers-that-be, meaning Drs. Miguel B. Gaffud* and Vitaliano Bernardino, to give it a try “for one year, as an experiment.”

Now that it is an accomplished fact, barrio high schools remain a fantastic dream to many people, including educators, who cannot quite get over the idea that this year there are 7

complete barrio high schools which have since the beginning been supported by the barrio people themselves. Always the first question asked of me is: “But where do the salaries of teachers come from? What about buildings, grounds, not to mention equipment?”

But why are the barrio high schools wanted by the barrio people? Well, why not? You will recall your experience in 1945 after having been deprived of our freedom and good food for nearly four years. I will never forget the first doughnut made of real flour and the “genuine” coffee served by the PCAU in my town in 1945. I do not know where I put them, but I ate 20 doughnuts and drank ten cups of coffee, in one sitting!

That was only four years of deprivation. What about our barrio folk having been deprived of high school, not to mention college, education all their lives, who all of a sudden are told they can have it if they are willing to pay for it? But, their real joy was their discovering that they can pay for it. Is it any

wonder why now the barrios that do not have it this year want it next year? Furthermore, try and close one of the high schools now, and you will have trouble in your hands. Unless the Government can put up a similar one, which would be impossible, we should allow the opening of barrio high schools provided that the people are willing and able to support them.

The fact is that one member of the Davao Provincial Board wrote me a letter which I have just received saying: first, there will be twice or more barrio high schools in Davao next year—there are 35 now; second, the barrio high schools are more stable financially than the provincial high schools; and third, the students are more serious in their studies than their counterparts in the regular provincial high schools.

In my second trip to La Union, I interviewed nine of the fourteen district supervisors, and asked them what the prospects were for new barrio high schools next year. The unanimous answer was that every barrio wants

one, no matter how small they are. In their opinion, there will be 33 more high schools in their districts, more than double the present number of 16. I would not be surprised if the number will reach near 100.

At this rate, it will not surprise anyone if there will be one thousand new barrio high schools next school year. Why not? The reasoning is perfectly simple and logical. "If they can have a high school in San Gregorio, we should have it in San Antonio, or there is something the matter with us."

This enthusiasm is contagious indeed, and there should be no effort made to stop it. The barrio people, of whom I am one, have been ridiculed and accused of being utterly dependent upon the Government for all their needs. Now, they discover all of a sudden that they need not be in matters pertaining to the establishment and maintenance of high schools for themselves and their children. If they are allowed to continue doing this, the time will not be far distant when they will feel different-

ly — that they need no longer depend upon the Government to meet their needs for higher education.

Now that it has been shown it can be done, who would dare put any obstacle to prevent the barrio people from establishing new high schools and from continuing the ones that are now operating? To do so would be committing a crime of the first magnitude, for it will be equivalent to depriving the youth of this country who number 2.5 million — of their inherent right for as high education as their powers permit, a right which is as important as right to life and food. Two years ago, it would have been pardonable for anyone to stop any move in this direction, but now, it is different after it has been shown it can be done by the people themselves.

I would be the last one to claim that barrio high schools are the best of all possible high schools. Of course, they are not, and even the best ones lack much to be desired. But, which is better a high school that is not the best or no high school at all? Who would not want to have the

best high school, but wishing one and getting one are as far apart as the poles?

It is good to have quality education, but provided it does not mean that only a few could have it. In Europe, where education is reputed to be of very high quality, the goal is elementary education for the masses and secondary and higher education for the elite. In the Philippines educational quality is meaningless without equality of educational opportunity. To aspire for quality is good and should be commended, but not if it means denying others the right to the same thing.

The morale of this is that we must give everybody an equal chance to have school education, which may not be the best, but we should strive to improve its quality. This means that we should have the kind and quality of high school education that we can afford and make every effort thereafter to improve it.

In answer to the question "Why barrio high schools?", one should ask another question: "Why not?" Or, put it this way, we cannot afford not to, meaning we cannot

afford to remain illiterate any longer.

And since it costs the Government nothing to have them, we can well repeat the radio advertisement for a food recipe which ends in the following words: "...mading lutuin, at mura pa!" After two years, we have more than doubled the number of public high schools in the Philippines — 250 — at little or no cost to the Government.

Having said all this, I do not wish to leave the impression that all is well with the existing barrio high schools and that we can just wait for them to multiply some more. There are a hundred or more problems, two of which are basic, namely: a) to help the barrio people earn and save what they need to support and maintain their high school; and b) to provide helpful supervision so that the standards will be reasonably high.

For the first, there are many plans, among which is the establishment of credit unions in all barrio schools — this plan is now in operation in Urdaneta, starting last

month (with ₱2,000 saved already by the pupils in the 25 barrio schools of that town, including those without barrio high schools). The credit union work, as all other work connected with it, earning more to save more, will be curricularized. It will be a part of the teachers' work to promote credit union activities not only among the pupils (from the first grade to the fourth year) but among the parents as well. The educational formula is: Teach the children and their parents in order to earn more, to save more, and to continue learning together.

For the second, department heads of the mother high school are given time and transportation expenses to supervise the barrio high schools and the periodical tests given in the various subjects.

But, more should be done. We cannot let the barrio high schools sink or swim. We must help them swim. One plan is to have a workshop to improve scientific equipment. We have now a plan on foot to compile a Directory of barrio high

schools and to send the list to different States of the U.S., to Japan, to Australia, to England, to enlist the help of high schools in these countries. If a high school in California will help a high school in Davao, this arrangement may well result in the students there sending books and magazines to their counterparts in the Philippines. We may be able to get inexpensive microscopes from Japan and transistor radios from Australia.

We graduated the first batch of 78 elementary teachers who will be teacher librarians of the community libraries to be established in each barrio high school in Pangasinan. Library rooms are being put up, and each library will be made a branch of the National Library, and it will be opened to the general public as well as to the elementary pupils and high school students.

We are offering in the UP Center of External Studies in Urdaneta a course in curriculum development which will be geared to the barrio high schools. The Philippine Normal College is now planning

a course which will train teachers to serve both the elementary and secondary levels. This summer, we plan to encourage assistant principals of barrio high schools to take up advanced courses in the teaching of high school subjects so that they can supervise their high school teachers as well. In the meanwhile the Peace Corps is interested in working with us by offering courses in the teaching of secondary mathematics, science and English to elementary teachers who may teach high school subjects on part-time basis.

Through the Barrio High Schools Bulletin, now subsidized by the Asia Foundation, having issued three numbers, we gather information from different places about better ways of financing and operating barrio high schools. We make the information available as quickly as possible to all barrio high schools in the country.

The Asia Foundation is interested in helping us further by making an additional grant to enable our six assistants to put in additional travel to be able to visit more

barrio high schools. In the seminar on problems of barrio high schools held recently in the Bureau of Public Schools, it was decided: first, to strengthen supervision of barrio high schools; and

second, to give achievement tests in all high school subjects before the end of the school year. — *Pedro T. Orata, From Freemasons' Educational Bulletin.*

ADVANTAGES OF OLD AGE

There is nothing more remarkable in the life of Socrates than that he found time in his old age to learn to dance and play on instruments, and thought it was time well spent. — *Montaigne*

What they tell of Cato, among other things, that in his extreme old age he began to learn Greek with a greedy appetite, as if to quench a long-standing thirst, does not appear to me very greatly to his honor. It is properly speaking what we should call falling into second childhood. — *Montaigne*

Old men delight in giving good advice as a consolation for the fact that they can no longer set bad examples. — *La Rochefoucauld*