

# EDUCATION FOR A LIVING

By BENJAMIN M. PASCUAL

ONCE AGAIN the labor market receives its annual glut of fresh job applicants—high school and college graduates who dream of wearing neckties or uniforms to office. The legion who have not finished the secondary course or are educationally disadvantaged have even less chances for gainful employment.

The high school graduates lack training that can handily qualify them for work, except in the most menial of jobs that are even scarce. Most of the college graduates have finished commerce, teaching, or the liberal arts. But neither private firms nor government institutions can stretch their budgets to take in supernumeraries or sinecures.

On the other hand, graduates from technological or technical courses are as scarce as a drizzle in hot season. The Philippine College of Arts and Trades illustrates this exhaustible source of trained manpower. Almost daily, service or manufacturing firms phone in their requests for, say, foundrymen or sheet metal workers, but the College cannot fill all their orders.

## Skilled Workers

Lately different studies have been pursued independently on projected needs of economic enterprises within the foreseeable future—from five to ten years hence, that is. Thus, research done by the Department of Graduate Studies of the Philippine College of Arts and Trades shows that in the occupational area of shoemaking alone, even at present there is a shortage of workers who are adept in several phases of shoemaking in Marikina, Rizal. The shoe industry, it appears, is willing to underwrite expenses for training young men into shoemakers and ul-

timately employing them. Another study by the PCAT involves the personnel needs of the mining industry. Vacancies, the study discloses, will be available for a number of technical jobs, especially with expansion by some mining firms in the offing.

The project director of the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education recently made the following observations as one official finding of that body:

"...This high social demand for education operating in the

context of almost unregulated free choice on the part of the population has caused a response in kind in terms of the proliferation of educational institutions and programs that are not guided by development authorities. The result is swelling enrolments in low-cost but low priority programs—such as teacher education, commerce and the liberal arts—while high priority programs such as vocational technical education and engineering suffer from enrolment shortages."

Much has been said about the youths' penchant or obstinate single-mindedness for white-collar or "necktie" jobs. As always, the stereotyped blame is pointed at the Spaniards who, it seems, centuries ago taught the "Indios" the virtue of not working with the hands. Further, it is claimed that even the Americans' love for work failed to change the Filipinos' heritage of sloth from the Spaniards. This was because the Americans themselves had clumsily introduced another evil in the form of a curriculum that was unresponsive to the people's economic and social needs, educating them only for a consumer economy. Even when we at last hauled down the American flag from its mast, we did not overhaul the educational system that they had transported to our shores lock, stock and barrel.

## Alienation

To finger anyone except ourselves as being blameable is, of course, simplistic wringing of hands. It has been fairly obvious in the quarter of a century of running our own affairs that education has remained a strange bedfellow to economic planning and development. And as Dr. Hermogenes F. Belen, an authority on Philippine vocational education, has aptly said, the present educational program alienates the youth from their native soil.

I think the young people of today are eager to work with their hands

*Hard facts show that most college trained white-collar or "necktie" workers have thinner pay envelopes than technological or technical course graduates. Filipino youngsters should be taught early certain skills for productive work, like the Japanese children.*

but they have not been taught mastery in any craft. Otherwise, if this were not so, there would be no takers for many high-paying blue-collar jobs that put to shame many necktie-sporting drones who are bound to the drudgery of sedentary work. Otherwise even high school graduates who have been shunned by business firms would not have determinedly taken up vocational courses or attended so-called evening opportunity classes. Otherwise there would be no increase of trade-technical, agricultural and fishery schools—although unblessed by circumspect planning—under the aegis of the National Government.

Hard facts that tend to denigrate mere collegiate training for white-collar or "necktie" jobs come readily to mind. In the government, clerks of different shades—most of them degree holders—have thinner pay envelopes than keypunch operators, telegraph operators, radio technicians or stenographers, among several, who have had just about two years of training above secondary level. These technical graduates even draw better pay than public school teachers.

#### Vocational Emphasis

In private enterprises, clerks or school teachers have lower remuneration than, say, boilermens, linotypists, electricians and telephone repairmen. Even accountancy personnel who have bachelor's degrees in business administration bring home less pay than graduates of the two- or three-year technical courses like drafting, electronics, foundry, metal work, to name a few. Lately a superintendent of a school of arts and trades was desperately hunting for graduates in drafting who would like to work in West Germany as patent draftsmen.

Many of these blue-collar workers eventually rise to supervisory positions like foreman or plant superintendent, or even to executive posts. Or else they pursue further schooling to become engineers. As leaders in the community, they participate actively in community development by reason of their specializations.

Obviously, therefore, the shift in emphasis in educational objective should be towards training along vocational or technical lines: truly education for a living. The universities that contemplate phasing out some of the courses they offer would do well to deemphasize commerce



and teaching, and instead boost technical and engineering courses.

It may be welcome news that the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education has recognized the necessity "to train the nation's manpower in the middle level skills required for national development." The Commission, it seems, endorses vocational/technical training of three types. There will be a short-term and a one-year or two-year term that are without transfer credits. A third type will be vocational training with transfer credits that enable students to take up collegiate work thereafter.

#### Inconsistency

Already much bruited about, the reorganization plan for the executive branch of the government, it appears, also upholds a policy of providing for technical and vocational

education and retraining programs that will receive first priority in order to meet future needs for trained manpower.

Yet the recommendations in the reorganization plan and in the report of the Presidential Commission both propose the abolition of the Bureau of Vocational Education and the transfer of its functions to a Bureau of Higher Education. An inconsistency between stressing vocational education and abolishing the agency that now takes care of it nags at the mind.

Experience in the past should forewarn planners that vocational/technical education programs may yet be relegated to an appendage role in the end and that it will receive bagatelle appropriations. Unless the Director of the projected bureau or the Secretary of Education and Culture will be apostles of

vocational education, or at least will be sympathetic to it—as most general education officials are not—, prospects for a strengthened or rejuvenated vocational education program may yet remain a mere pipe dream.

The proposal to establish so-called complete schools to replace existing public high schools and secondary vocational schools, to take care of middle level education, is an importation from abroad. Some educators say that comprehensive schools have been failures in the United States, yet there is alacrity to transplant them to Philippine soil. Here, it would seem, the planners may yet be short-changing the government by failing to put up an indigenous program of education.

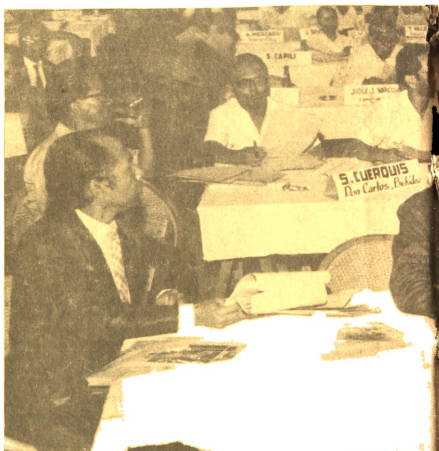
### Example of Japan

It does not seem possible that the entire Philippines will be metamorphosed into a highly industrialized country in this decade, even giving allowance for a speedier electrification of rural areas. With, say, the last three years of the decade as period of adjustment to a partly industrial economy transforming the rural areas, it will still be necessary to train young people for occupations that will enable them to be self-employed if they will not be absorbed by industry. Meantime only a comfortable percentage should be given technician training—those only that industries, existing or to be established, will need.

Let us take the example of Japan, where cottage industries thrived prosperously before nationwide and sophisticated industrialization techniques altered the economic and geographical landscape of that country. Several vocational education supervisors from the Philippines once visited Japan to observe educational practices. These supervisors stared incredulously at what were the proofs of delicate skills of Japanese children, not yet thirteen years old, such as water color brushes, fountain pens, cigarette lighters, toys, folding fans, etc., made in the home. Moreover, all the children's creations were indisputably saleable economic goods!

There is no reason why Filipino tykes, whose mindlessness with their hands is traditional, cannot also be trained like the Japanese children. This, then, should be an illuminating objective of Philippine education. ●

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