

# The Silver Lining Behind the Educational Act of 1940

PEDRO T. ORATA



As chairman of the Board of Consultants of the Joint Congressional Committee on Education, I was in full agreement with my colleagues in recommending the abolition of the double-single session scheme in the primary grades and the restoration of Grade VII. However, after studying and observing educational conditions in many countries since joining UNESCO two and a half years ago, I have come gradually to realize that the Educational Act of 1940, which introduced these changes in the Philippine educational system, was not an unmixed curse to the Filipino people. The Act has been criticized as "a centavo-wise and a peso-foolish economy," which it was neither. In fact, it was not an economy measure at all, except indirectly, but a means of equalizing and democratizing education at a time when less than half of the children of school age were privileged to go to school.

While I am still in favor of abolishing the double-single session scheme, I maintain now that, in a very large measure, it was because of the Educational Act of 1940 that we have reached the saturation point in school enrollment sooner, much sooner in fact, than even the most hopeful optimists at the time among us, including the father of the Act, Dr. Bocobo, himself, could have predicted ten years ago. I recall now that Dr.

Bocobo's argument was this: "Half a loaf is better than no loaf." That was for the primary grades. For the intermediate, he might as well have added: "Two-thirds of a loaf is infinitely better."

He was speaking on behalf of the three million school-age children who were not having the benefit of education at all. It would have been fantastic to believe then, as it still seems incredible to see it as an accomplished fact even now, that such a large number of children — one and a half times as many as the total school enrollment at that time—could be accommodated in the schools within the relatively short span of ten years. But, the miracle has happened in the Philippines, and today, because of the foresight of Dr. Bocobo and the legislators that supported his view, we can cite the fact, without blushing, that two out of every nine Filipinos are now in school, a record which is only a little lower than that of the United States whose corresponding ratio—one out of every four—is the highest in the world. Our record would stand out even more significantly if compared with other ratios, to wit: Canada and Japan, 1:5; France, 1:7; United Kingdom and Belgium, 1:8; Spain, 1:10; Brazil and Colombia, 1:12; Egypt, 1:19; Hong-kong and India and Pakistan,



1:22. (Ratios derived from a United Nations source: Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women. "Educational Opportunities for Women". General, E/CN.6/155, 6 June 1950. Table entitled: "Total Populations, Illiteracy and School Enrollment by Sex at Various Educational Levels.")

That is the first score in favor of Dr. Bocobo's unpopular Educational Act of 1940. Because of our having reached the saturation point in enrollment in 1950 which, as I have indicated, is due to the operation of the Act, adult illiteracy in the Philippines twenty or thirty years hence should be near the vanishing point, while the average world illiteracy would still be nearer 75 than 50%. Personally, I hope to live long enough to reach 1970, for then I would feel relieved of the terrific feeling of inferiority as a result of our country's being called under-developed and illiterate, and deserving, not of education, as such, but education with that most dreadful qualifying adjective, **fundamental**, or **basic**, or **mass**, ever invented to stigmatize three-quarters of the populations of the earth. Through our own experience, one and a half billion fellow-illiterates might get rid of that stigma in the manner that we have done it. Seen in that light, the Educational Act of 1940 might yet prove to be a landmark, not only in our own educational history but in world's educational annals. I hope that in Unesco's conference in 1952 we should be represented by someone who can tell in graphic form the significance of that experience to us and can offer it to the rest of the world for what it may be worth in their struggle for equalizing and demo-

cratizing education in their own countries.

The third count in Dr. Bocobo's favor is not without considerable significance for those who wish to see the facts without preconception. The main reason why private schools have grown in number and enrollment faster than mushrooms in July is that the Government has been unable, fast enough, to accommodate all children of school age. The justification, once made by an Under-Secretary of Education, for allowing private schools to open even if their standards were low, was that there were many public schools whose standards were not any higher, and whose facilities, in fact, were less adequate. Now, with the saturation point in enrollment reached, we can and in earnest must start improving the quality of education being offered in the public schools, with the result that private schools must improve likewise, or they will have to close up shop. The point, therefore, is that in consequence of the operation of the Educational Act of 1940 which hastened our reaching the apex of school enrollment diploma mill private schools will vanish faster and sooner than without the Act having been enforced.

This is not to say, and I have never said anywhere and at any time, that the double-single session scheme should continue indefinitely, or that Grade VII should not be restored. On the contrary, as I said at the beginning, I am in favor, in fact, I urge wholeheartedly the restoration of the full-day session in the primary grades **now**, or as soon as funds may be available. I believe that the improvement of educa-



tional quality should include the immediate restoration of the full-day session in the primary grades, and we should not wait to do so until and unless the seventh grade could also be restored. I do not believe we—speaking of us educators—can justify a larger percentage of the national income for education than is now the case which, according to President Quirino, “is 38% of the total annual expenditures.” (The President’s Budget Message on Education. *Philippine Journal of Education*, February 1951, p. 504)

It is commonplace that we cannot educate in a social vacuum, not to say, in a disorderly or dislocated society, which we would be compelled to do if, because of devoting fifty per cent or more of the national income to education, the rest of the social services—health and social welfare, industry and agriculture, internal security, not to mention the others—would be paralyzed if not crippled. For,

—how can the schools develop character in the children and youth in a community which, because of inadequate police force and poorly paid and subject to corruption judges, is unable to enforce and maintain law and order?

—how can teachers hope that their pupils will carry over into their own homes the rules of health that they study in their classes if, because of lack of adequate sanitary facilities and services, the community suffers in filth and disease?

—how can the intermediate and high school teachers, however much they may emphasize and vitalize vocational training, encourage the young people to enroll in vocational courses and to develop

proper attitudes and habits of work if, because of low standards in the trades and other skilled and semi-skilled occupations, wages are low and working conditions in factories and on the farms are primitive and intolerable?

If I remember right, the restoration of Grade VII will require ₱20,000,000, and of the full-day session in the primary grades, another ₱40,000,000. With both the Grade VII and the full-day session in the primary grades restored, the appropriation for education would have to be increased so that the total would be more than 50% of the national budget for 1952. The highest percentage of income devoted to education, outside the Philippines, that I know is that of the United States—which is less than 25%. In Europe, it is rare to find as high a percentage, in fact, the average is close to 20%. In South America, the corresponding figure is from 7% to 15%, the average being about 10%. In Thailand, it was 13% two years ago, and in Burma, about 7%. I do not know any country outside the Philippines where the teachers are receiving as high as three times their pre-war salaries. This is not to say that teachers salaries are too high now, in fact, they are still too low compared with responsibilities. All I am saying is that in proportion to income, we are way ahead the majority of countries in the world, and that the fair way to increase teachers’ salaries and educational facilities further is to raise the earning and taxing capacity of our people and not to cut down still deeper into the bone, as it were, of the national budget.



Speaking of the restoration of Grade VII, while it may help improve educational quality in the high school and college, I am not so certain that it is an indispensable condition. The pattern in the majority of civilized countries the world over is a six-year elementary course. Even the United States is now tending towards a shortened elementary course, most especially in recent years when the boys must render one or more years of military service. (Fred M. Hechinger. *The Speed-Up in Education*. **New York Herald Tribune**, May 2 and 3, 1951) There is nothing sacred about the seventh grade or a seven-year elementary education. What is most important is that during the six-year course—assuming that it be really six years, and not four half-years plus two full years as is now the practice—the quality and aim of education that is provided is useful and of high standard. And we all know that there is a great deal that can and should be done to improve the elementary course—and the high school and college courses also—before the restoration of Grade VII or even the full-day session in the primary grades. As I talked to teachers and read their lesson plans in my visit to the Philippines last December and January, I had a feeling that there was still much that was being taught, not because it was important to the boys and girls that were made to learn it, but that tradition required that it be taught to them or that it was required for college entrance, not considering the fact that only three per cent of the children in the first grade ever hope to reach the college or university level.

Fortunately, the situation is changing fast and for the better, and our leadership in education—speaking mainly of the public schools—is firm in the direction towards improving the content of education and liberalizing college entrance requirements so as to admit units on work experience to the extent of 40% of the total secondary course. It is high time that we stop agonizing and complaining, not to say offering false alibi, as many of our leaders have been doing since liberation, that before we can improve educational substance we must first do away with the form that was imposed upon it by the Educational Act of 1940. To continue arguing in this manner is the surest way to despair and the height of defeatism. It would be better to look at the Educational Act of 1940 as a blessing in disguise, and to be thankful that, as a result of it, we can feel justly proud that a recent visitor to the Philippines, Dr. Malcolm Adiseshiah, Head of Unesco's Technical Assistance Service, said last April: "Your educational system is far, far ahead of the Far East, so far ahead in fact that you do not need much technical assistance."

It is heartening to note that the Philippine Normal College is leading the way, as it is expected to do, towards an integrated and, it is hoped, highly vitalized curriculum in the elementary grades in the Training Department. I say **vitalized** because any curriculum, be it ever so traditional and bookish, can be highly integrated—as is France's curriculum in the elementary grades, and in all levels except in the technical and vocational schools. Only as the content of education is appropriate and pertinent to the needs and



problems of the Philippines and graded according to the maturity and interests of Filipino children may it be called useful and important, and for that the restoration of Grade VII is not really indispensable. (Calleja, Estela A. How the Integrated Activity Program in the P.N.C. Training Department Was Launched. *Philippine Journal of Education*, February 1951, p. 461-62, 470)

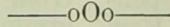
Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, eminent former pastor of Riverside Church, in New York, once said that in order to live in our world today with all its hazards and uncertainties, one must be able at times to "convert a minus into a plus"—to use adversity to strengthen one's moral muscles and sinews. The Educational Act of 1940, long condemned as an educational minus, must now be regarded as an educational plus, if we are to be honest in acknowledging its many blessings which I have indicated. It was because of this measure that we have equalized educational opportunity in the Philippines at a time when three quarters of the nations of the world are still struggling with the problem, when in fact, these countries would be satisfied with fundamental education or even with three week's literacy teaching under the Laubach "each-one-teach-one" method.

I repeat, to avoid misunderstanding: First, that I am for the immediate abolition of the double-session scheme in the primary grades, as top priority consideration in improving educational quality, not only in the primary grades but on the higher level as well; second, that Grade VII may be restored provided that in so doing other essential social services would not suffer in conse-

quence; third, it is time that the schools contribute directly towards the economic productivity of the people through increased and vitalized work-experience curricula from the first grade up to the graduate school of the university, to enable the Government to carry the increasing cost of education; and lastly, that we should not make the restoration of Grade VII or even the full-day session in the primary grades the condition for revising the school curriculum for every grade.

As a people of the Christian faith, we are for giving credit to whom the credit is due. It is time that we must admit the significant contribution of the Educational Act of 1940 towards democratizing and equalizing educational opportunity in the Philippines within an unbelievably short period of ten years, in spite of the fact that for one-third of that period we were the unwilling victims of a bloody war which crippled our major industries and resulted in our school children losing thirteen million pupil educational years. While it is undoubtedly true that within that period we lost on educational quality, still we may, if we be honest and practical, consider the corresponding gain in educational equality worth more than the price that we paid for it. And, we must not forget that in twenty or thirty years, as a result of our having attained educational equality in 1950, when three-fourths of mankind will still be in the fringe of illiteracy, we should be approaching the literacy figure of North America and Western Europe, which is not a mean prospect at all.

The next step, indeed the challenge, for us the younger group of educators, is to maintain the equality of educational opportunity that we have so far achieved and to redouble our efforts and finances to improve its quality on all levels and fronts. I believe we can do it, and I have faith that we will do it!



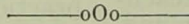
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would have to undergo in being away from home, let alone the prospect of falling into deep financial difficulties, she goes forth to pursue further studies, with the thought that with the added training and preparation she could be of much better use to the profession. Poor soul! What would she find but the same old supervisor who may perhaps have heard of this so-called community school but would never be sold to the idea. And if she asks questions or makes suggestions, would she be heard? Not with this kind of "traditional" supervisors and administrators who think that they would not be occupying their present "exalted" positions if they did not know everything there is to know about education. And so they continue giving orders in the same old "capataz" style. And the

teachers? Well, theirs is not to reason why. Under such circumstances, what can the poor teacher do?

Fortunately, progressive minds have taken over the leadership of our educational set-up. They have realized that the community school in a school-centered community is by far the only means by which to improve conditions in rural areas. They are aware of the fact that the teacher, who is to effect the change, must be set free. For, unless supervision and administration be made more liberal and democratic, not only in theory but in actual implementation, and unless the teacher herself breaks away from the fetters that shackle her, this enthusiastic movement would become but another fad and fancy soon to be forgotten in "tomorrow's hinterlands."



### WHAT IS . . .

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they need. To this end democracy holds that—

1. The only way we can have more is to produce more and,
2. As we produce more, we must make it possible for more and more people to enjoy what is produced.

Thus have I attempted to summarize briefly the principles, beliefs and practices which, when taken as a whole, constitute the best answer I can give to the first question I raised a few moments ago: "What is the democratic way of life?"