

THE LOSING BATTLE OF GENERAL EDUCATION

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We look at the students pat-
tering in the shops of the public
high schools and contemplate the
measly offering of vocational
courses — woodworking, horticul-
ture, agronomy, poultry and swine,
retail merchandizing, sometimes
general metal, electricity and au-
tomotive—and we wonder if the
loud-mouthed fulmination of the
P.T.A. president in behalf of the
paying parents or the member of
the provincial board in behalf of
the paying taxpayers are not more
than the biased half of the truth.
There is a stunted patch of ground
with cabbages and tomatoes; there
is a half-hearted poultry where
half of the chickens died from pest
not so long ago; there is a lone sow
with some sucklings grunting dis-
consolately in its dusty-smelly cor-
ner of the school site; there is a
woodworking shop with a few
hand tools and a wood-and-sawali
shed built by the students and some
scrawny furniture all these to show
for the vocational work in the
small general high school in an
ordinary small town.

It is not an encouraging affair.
Parents look askance at its crude
imitation of work. Officials frown
at the vocational courses that are
ever in need of subsidy and talk
of abolishing the vocational courses
so as to reduce the tuition fees to
politically feasible levels. Students
are depressed by the high-toned
classroom lectures on vocational
efficiency and self-sufficiency and
the dignity of labor, all in deep
and dark contrast with the actual-

ity of scratching the hard and hos-
tile earth with a bit of sharpened
stick or going about begging for
feed or practicing retailing on a
cooperative "store" that can only
capitalize a few bars of candy and
a few packages of school supplies.
The theory and the practice do not
quite fit each other. The vision
and the dream overmeasure too
much the lowly reach of the real-
ity.

No wonder parents stand up at
open forums where a member of
the provincial board or a school
official tries to justify the hiking
of tuition fees from P60 to P75 or
P80 by citing the difference in the
curriculum between the private
academic high schools and that of
the public general high school. "To
the general curriculum," say the
justifiers of higher fees, "there are
added the vocational courses which
train the youth to love labor and
appreciate its dignity. Such
courses would make everybody's
child, rich or poor, go down to the
basic fundamental of group living
—work and fruitfulness rather
than lazy dependence and parasit-
ism. Such courses prepare the
youth for the impending industrial-
ization of the country.. And so
forth and so on. But these are not
convincing arguments in the face
of inadequate equipment that
makes vocational preparation a
pale imitation of actual working
conditions, in the face of ill-pre-
pared teaching, in the face of
an unsympathetic administration
that would set aside no subsidy, in

the teeth of the propaganda of competing and often triumphant private schools. The climb has generally been upward, yes, but alas! too slow. Very rare birds are schools that approximate the equipment and the quality of vocational offerings in the Abellana High School of Cebu City. Only too often competing private schools gobble up those schools that insist on offering courses that have beautiful vocational intentions but fail miserably in making the intentions a reality. And the beautiful ideal and the vision and the dream flop, and there are heard injurious, nay insulting war whoops of triumph from neighboring private schools accompanied by the lugubrious groans and lamentations from the afflicted, a depressing mixture of savage joy and cultured sorrow, a reproach by the people to those who have allowed such things to pass.

In the meantime, our public high schools die through the simple process of attrition. Every year that passes, more and more school children are diverted to schools that offer exclusively academic subjects. The private schools are the heaven of the lovers of easy and abbreviated studies. Only the diehard loyalists, who have public school education in blood and who can afford the higher cost of public education, remain within the public schools. Those who can not pay the higher fees, those who can not appreciate the half-hearted results of ill-equipped vocational offerings, leave the public secondary schools. The rest remain, only to see it wither on the vine and at last fall, still a bud and a promise, not given a chance to attain its ripe fulfillment.

And yet it is really a beautiful

idea that is behind the general curriculum. Our country has a group of leaders who have learned the virtues of academic learning and have developed spellbinding eloquence that win the hearts and the votes of the people. On the other hand, we have the common mass that work with their hands and listen rapt to the oratory and cast the votes. Between these two is a gap that is ever-widening, for leadership trained in purely academic ways, without work experience, can hardly sympathize with work and the just demands of labor. On the other hand, the masses grovel in their dust, lean on their hoes, and look askance at their leaders weaned from them with the help of white-collar academic education. Only the general high schools can give leaders that will bridge the gap and help insure a workable democracy.

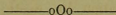
Often, too, the country is all excited about industrialization and the beautiful hope it promises about relieving bankruptcy and deficits and ending forever the inconvenience of import control and the tragedy of unemployment. The manpower potential of the Philippines prepared in the general high schools, by the time such industrialization comes, should be ready to receive the finishing touches of intensive vocational training needed to adapt them to the specific industrial jobs awaiting them. It is the job of the general high schools to give the necessary general training so as to prepare the coming workingmen and the coming technicians for the finishing touches of preparation that would fit them for jobs to come. Thus the general high schools inculcate love of work and appreciation of the place and value of work and labor in the modern

world. They are there given the basic and fundamental skills regarding the handling of basic tools and basic materials. The students are given a chance to survey the broad field of human economic endeavor in order to be able to determine for themselves the necessary equipment and aptitudes needed for such work, and then to look inward and determine for themselves their peculiar strengths and weaknesses that would fit or unfit them for specific jobs. The general high schools, in brief, form a vast clearing house for talent and aptitudes.

In them, also, the future citizens are given an orientation in efficient, full, and gracious living so that they may not be mere drudges and drones of industry but rather thinking and enjoying men and women who can understand and appreciate their places in the complicated scheme of things and appreciate the value of their contribution to the sum total of human happiness. Thus they will be better-satisfied human beings, more efficient participants in social processes, more grateful beneficiaries of public services, more eager helpers of those in need, more active supporters of worthy movements. It is a beautiful idea,

and the experiment of years and years in Batangas, Capiz, Tarlac, and other places pointed clearly to the necessity for the generalization of such a curriculum.

But the optimistic planning days of 1938-1941 and the years of early liberation could not quite anticipate the new canker of cheap competition that could neither understand nor appreciate the idealism of social service but would bloat itself on pelf and self-aggrandizement, spurn the worthy ideal of gearing *whatchamacallit* to *whatchamacallit*. The blight has spread and has ruined much of the anticipated harvest; the tentacles having reached out and are strangling the worthy ideal. And the parents groan, the public school teachers and the school officials grovel, the honorable elected officials responsible for the support and maintenance of such schools raise their hands in despair or shrug their shoulders and give up, and while these three entities moan and lament, there is ahead the dance of triumph of those who have achieved victory and all to the accompaniment of the merry jingling of a million silver coins. The whole thing is as surely a dirge to a nation that is missing the bus and for a reason nobody seems to understand just yet.



WORK

The workers are the saviors of society, the redeemers of the race.

—Eugene V. Debs—Speech, 1905

*No man is born into the world whose work
Is not born with him; there is always work,
And tools to work withal, for those who will;
And blessed are the horny hand of toil!*

LOWELL—A glance Behind the Curtain