

FUNDAMENTAL EDUCATION THROUGH COMMUNITY-CENTERED SCHOOLS in the Philippines ¹

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Since the most significant educational effort in the Philippines in recent years has been concentrated on the promotion of fundamental education, this report will be confined to this aspect of our educational program in 1950-1951.

Under the auspices of the Bureau of Public Schools, the Philippine Association of School Superintendents (PASS) has held within the last two years two conventions on two aspects of fundamental education, namely education in rural areas and adult education. Only last month, June 1951, the Philippine Public School Teachers Association (PPSTA), an association of 87,000 teachers, held a convention and discussed the problems of promoting fundamental education and organizing community-centered schools. The conventions of teachers and school administrators show how great is the interest of our people in fundamental education. In fact, during the school year 1950-51, the subject that absorbed most of the interest and engaged most of the effort of our educators, teachers, and parents is fundamental education and its counterpart, the community-centered school.

The movement has been developing for some years, but the last two years saw its most rapid development. As in many other

countries, it is the result of conditions brought about by the last World War. The end of the war brought peace after three years of enemy occupation, but, as in many other countries, it also brought us economic hardships, demoralization, juvenile delinquency, and even habits of resistance against constituted authority. More than ever our educators were convinced that something immediate, even drastic, had to be done to improve the lot of our masses. Being educators, they pinned their hopes on education, but it had to be the type of education that faces the facts of life squarely, education that functions and is a real factor in the remaking of our people's lives.

At that time no concrete examples of fundamental education projects were available as models. Literature on the subject was largely theoretical and speculative, and printed materials were scarce. Our educational leaders were challenged to think out new ways, new techniques, new devices to meet unexpected difficulties and to suit local conditions. The directorate of the public schools of the Philippines, acting partly on a need long felt and given expression in the nation-wide survey conducted by the Joint Congressional Survey Committee on Edu-

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cation and partly on the wise advice of a team of experts sent to the Philippines by UNESCO in 1948, saw it fit to provide a climate favorable to the exercise of local initiative to cope with local problems. This resulted in the development of the community-centered school idea. Soon, some of the publications of UNESCO began to fall into the hands of our educators, and their visions were widened with comparative data and the description of projects in other countries. The concept of fundamental education which they had strived so hard to formulate and define happily found confirmation in the publications of UNESCO and the movement soon crystallized into what we call the community-centered schools of the Philippines.

These community-centered schools attempt to eliminate as much as possible the barriers that used to exist between the classroom and the world of actual life outside. They attempt to make the school a part of the community, and the community a part of the school. Through community councils and parent-teacher associations, in which both school people and laymen take active and co-equal partnership in the planning and management of school affairs, a more realistic and more desirable school program is being worked out all the time. The curriculum for these community-centered schools is also being developed with the active participation of the people whose children these schools serve. More and more do our classrooms look to the people and the community for assistance in the working out of the school program and in the execution of such

program. Our school facilities have been put at the disposal of the people, with the result that school shops are being used for the teaching of vocations to adults, our school libraries are used for literacy work, and our playgrounds are the people's playground. The results of this arrangement are twofold. On the one hand, we note improvement in conditions in our communities and in the daily lives of our people, while on the other we see improvement in our school curriculum and in our classroom techniques.

So rich are the possibilities of the movement and so stirring is the story of its initial achievements—at least to our people—that our schoolmen, from school superintendents to public school teachers, have thrown the full weight of their combined influence and effort in order to back it up. The PASS has already published a yearbook entitled **Education in Rural Areas for Better Living**. A second yearbook, entitled **Adult Education in Action**, will soon be off the press. The supervisory and administrative program of the Bureau of Public Schools of the Philippines during the school year 1951-1952, which is the development of the curriculum for the community-centered school, will be the theme of the third yearbook of the PASS. Our school superintendents and the teachers under them, together with laymen interested in curriculum development, are now working cooperatively on the problem, and the forthcoming yearbook will not be merely a theoretical discussion of curriculum development but will be a description of outstanding

achievements in the different school divisions of the Philippines.

Recently, under the leadership of Senator Geronima T. Pecson, a legislator who is interested in education and a member of the Executive Board of the UNESCO the Unesco Philippine Educational Foundation (UPEF) was organized. Solidly backed up by all persons and entities interested in the development of the Philippine educational system, the UPEF has started a drive to raise the sum of \$200,000 which will be devoted largely to the promotion of fundamental education. This is a non-governmental organization and membership in it is voluntary, but it is succeeding because it proposes to find solutions to problems which our people consider vital.

In the Philippines we have grave problems of illiteracy. Roughly forty percent of our adult population can not read and write. If by the term **literacy** we mean the ability to read and write so as to enable one to take active part in community activities, then the rate of illiteracy in our country would be even higher. The campaign against illiteracy is urgent, yet we have not singled it out and isolated it from other problems of fundamental education. We believe that the problem of illiteracy should not be solved separate from economic, civic, cultural, and health problems. The gravity in each one of these aspects of life makes the others grave, and the alleviation in one helps alleviate the others. Believing in this, we have tried to make our people conscious of the need for bettering their economic conditions through the improvement of agricultural

and industrial techniques, while at the same time making them more active participants in the civic, social and cultural activities of their community. Citizens who have been helped to attain economic prosperity can build more sanitary homes and can live in more healthful surroundings. All these interests and interrelated activities have been used as leverages to facilitate the campaign against illiteracy, just as literacy can in turn be used as a leverage in the promotion of culture, civic conscience, and other aspects of the program.

Perhaps most significant of the many things that have been worked out as a result of our trials and many errors during the last few years is the organization of what we call the "little democracies" of the Philippines. These are neighborhood associations, each composed of from twenty to perhaps hundred or more families, each organized and later advised by a school teacher or a group of school teachers. Through these organizations, the people have become conscious of their needs, of the importance of organizing for group action, of the necessity for active participation in community affairs. The evils of civic indifference and its concomitant lack of vigilance in the protection of basic rights and freedoms are given stress not through word of mouth alone but through example and participation. Since these organizations are small, every citizen has a chance to assert his individuality and become a personality, perhaps an influence, in the small world in which he moves. Through such groups—and there are thousands of them in the Philippines

—the people mobilize their resources, no matter how limited, so as to make the fullest use of them in the solution of their own problems.

The movement for fundamental education in the Philippines was initiated and launched by schools and school teachers, but soon it was taken over by the masses of our people. We have not had a long tradition of democratic participation, for our experience with practical democracy has not been longer than half a century, but our fundamental education program has convinced us that our people now have an appreciation of the fundamental processes of democracy as well as its basic freedoms. As the movement gathers momentum, as new problems arise with the appearance of new needs at an ever rising level or quality of living, new techniques are also being worked out and new competencies developed. Thus the very act of living and striving to live better has become a vital process of education, and the very act of being educated through cooperation with the community-centered schools has brought our people rich opportunities for living.

Various techniques and devices have been worked out during the last two years. We have established project centers in some provinces, we have established pilot projects in every province and in almost every community. We have seen hundreds of communities taking part in the education of the people in the ways of cleanliness so that they no longer drink water from surface wells nor from common drinking cups, nor eat with bare hands. Sanitary toilets have been constructed. The peo-

ple have filled low and swampy places. They have established reading centers in thousands of neighborhoods. All these have been done by the people themselves, without legislation to compel them, without dictation from above. The teachers and the schools initiated the movement with demonstrations and other means of mass communication, then the people were organized into associations of cooperating and mutually helping neighbors, and soon the movement has become nation-wide.

We have used our schools to start new industries or to revive old ones which have died. Whole provinces are having campaigns in the planting of more fruit trees or the establishment of model poultry and piggery projects. Model homes have been planned, blueprinted, and constructed so that the typical bamboo-and-nipa home of the Filipino farmer or fisherman may, with the same labor and at the same expense, have better facilities and more conveniences. In all these we have used what we in the Philippines call the native approach. This is to say that not only do we study the needs and problems of our people but also learn their ways of thinking, their methods of doing things, their customs, their traditions, their mores, their prejudices. We take all these into consideration. This does not mean, however, that we do not apply selective assimilation of foreign ways and foreign culture; we merely take our people as they are and improve them where they are. We use techniques of mass communication within our people's comprehension and within the means which they

can afford or provide. For this, too, is true—that the people through their little democracies, provide the very means of carrying out the program of fundamental education.

We have also had to try and adopt new techniques for our classrooms in order that the changes happening among our people outside might be matched and might find reinforcement in the understanding and cooperation of the youth. For almost half a century we have been using traditional classroom techniques—that is, question-and-answer- and recitation procedures—but it took the last two years of intense effort in fundamental education in our communities for our teachers to adopt new ways of teaching in our classrooms so that their efforts within these classrooms might be consistent with their efforts without.

Our pupils are now encouraged to participate in the planning and the carrying out of their own school experiences. We have been trying to integrate the different subjects into bigger blocks of subject matter or areas of living so that our teachers may not teach subjects but pupils, and that our pupils may not learn books or subjects but useful and happy living itself.

This situation has brought about many problems in the in-service education of our teachers. We have held workshops, conferences, conventions, visitations, summer classes—all sorts of devices to reorient our teachers in their new tasks and to provide them with new competencies. We have also engaged the cooperation of our educational journals, namely the **Philippine Educator**, organ of the Philippine Public School Teachers

Association, the **Philippine Journal of Education**, and the **Filipino Teacher**, as well as local newspapers, in order that materials needed to educate our teachers and even the masses of our people in the new education may be more widely diffused.

Our own public normal schools, where our teachers are trained, have introduced integrated procedures in their training departments. They have started off-campus practice teaching for student teachers. Three new courses in rural sociology, in fundamental and adult education, and in the community school have been introduced. New attitudes, new points of view, new sympathies, new competencies are now required of our teachers, and our teacher-training institutions are responding to the new needs.

After fifty years of constant effort to make English the national language of our people, our recent work in fundamental education and nation-wide surveys made in recent years have convinced us that the use of a foreign language, though highly desirable in making our people a part of the world of culture and the one world of nations, is not an effective medium of instruction in fundamental education. We now know that to reach the masses of our people, we have to base our education on their own native tongue, which comes easily to them and which enables them to achieve literacy within a comparatively short time and with comparatively little effort. Also, through instruction in their own language they become better individuals, more helpful neighbors, and more cooperative citizens in a much shorter time than when

(Continued on page 19)