

Secretary Gregorio Hernandez Jr.*

(A Recapitulation of His Educational Leadership)

By Isabelo Tupas

IT is the concensus of Philippine educators that no head of the Philippine Educational System has contributed so much, in so short a time, to contemporary educational thinking as the late Secretary Gregorio Hernandez, Jr. His philosophies on education are so eminently responsive to the pulse of the time and contemporary public opinion that they have become the patterns of present day educational reforms. Unfortunately he died before he could witness the results of the educational reforms which he had envisioned.

FACETS OF HIS LIFE

Secretary Hernandez, Jr. was the only cabinet member who perished with the President and his entourage in a plane crash on the slope of Mt. Manungal in Cebu. During his brief public service of less than 3 years, he had attained such national stature and popularity that the people were struck dumb with grief when they heard of his violent death.

He first saw the light of day on April 20, 1913 in Malabon, Rizal. After finishing the primary grades at the National University he moved to San Juan de Letran College for his intermediate studies, then on to the Ateneo de Manila for his high school where he graduated with honors. In the same institution he took up his collegiate studies finishing his A.A. in 1931, summa cum laude. At the University of Santo Tomas he studied law and finished it, magna cum laude.

After this he practiced law with well-known lawyers in Manila and subsequently became a solicitor in the Department of Justice. At the early period of the liberation he was assigned chief legal counsel of the defunct U.S.—Philippine War Damage Commission, and later dean of the UST college of law, until his appointment as Secretary of Education on June 30, 1954, which position he held until his death on March 17, 1957.

He was survived by his wife, Mrs. Maxima H. Hernandez and seven children, Roberto being the eldest, 19 years old, and Maria Carmen the youngest, 10 months old.

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With his death the Department of Education lost a gallant educational reformer and an earnest moral crusader. What is the more tragic is that he died at the threshold of the greatest educational venture of his times, of which he was the chief architect, and with it the vision of his great design.

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

When the late Secretary Hernandez, Jr. assumed the high office of the Secretary of Education, he expressed his views on educational matters with such power of language and clarity of thought that they may stand out as among the masterpieces of Philippine educational literature. A unique characteristic of these views is a balanced and lucid wisdom which reconciles extremes of opinions and thus leads the way to educational sanity. From his speeches we now attempt to crystallize and bring to a focus his educational philosophies that gave force and substance to the educational program under his short-lived administration:

1. The Three-Fold Right To Education

a. The student is a member of three societies, distinct from one another and yet harmoniously contributing to his development; one which links him with the family, one with the state, and the third with God. Education for the well-being of society implies a recognition of the right of the student to prepare himself for his functions in each of these societies.

b. It is the parents and not the state that have the natural right and duty to educate the child; that in the fulfillment of this right and duty the parents have the right to demand the support and aid of the state.

c. It is from his teacher that the student must learn that the state exists for the individual and that the individual has inalienable rights which the state can neither give nor take away.

d. The school and teachers also have a duty to recognize the rights of the child to take his place in the third society into which he is born — that which links him with his Creator, his God.

2. State's Right On Supervision of Private Schools

a. While it is true that private schools are privately owned, privately financed, and privately controlled — nevertheless, no one can deny that the work in which they were engaged is not exclusively their own concern. It is also the concern of the parents of the youth they are training; it is also the concern of the State in which the youth they are training; will be citizens.

b. All educational institutions shall be under the supervision of and subject to regulation by the State. (Sec. 5, Article XIV of the Constitution)

c. The school system must be more in keeping with the prestige of independence, more democratic — away from the idea that good educational practice and methods are the exclusive monopoly of state officials — and closer to the sound educational principle that the best and most effective supervision is self-supervision; that the best way to insure improvement is to encourage self-improvement.

d. The improvement of private schools can only be a voluntary process, encouraged and led by the government, rather than enforced by detailed inspection and policing. They should be free from curricular requirements which leave insufficient room for experimentation and innovation. They should be allowed to conduct educational experiments and to try out new ideas, which, if they work, may later be adopted in the public schools.

e. The school operators in the exercise of such freedom must show good faith, honesty and sincerity of purpose to improve the educational standards of their institutions, in which case they should be allowed the greatest latitude consistent with the provisions of law and the Constitution. But where the operators show that their only concern is to do more than strict minimal prescription and their actions betray that their only interest is the exploitation of the educational process as means of self-enrichment, these operators should be dealt with the full vigor of the law.

f. There must be unity and coordination in achieving the goal of education. The private schools, the public schools, and the government, are not as strangers that pass each other in the night. Like the parts into which all Gaul was divided in the days of Julius Caesar, they are a trinity in a unity — a unity in the objective of making the Philippines a more prosperous, progressive, and happier place for our children to live in, unity in effort to achieve that goal.

3. Religious Instruction and Political Freedom

a. The matter of religious instruction at the option of the parents is recognized by the constitution. It affirms that the child is not the mere creature

of the state; that those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty to recognize and prepare him for additional duties transcending the state. This recognition of the right of parents is in line with the sound political traditions of limited government, and against the claim of an absolute and omnipotent state. It is also in line with the principle of freedom which affirms that while there are things that belong to Caesar and should be given to Caesar, there are also things that belong to God and should be given to God.

b. The public cannot fulfill its distinct role in the fashioning of moral leadership among our youth unless it is founded on a vigorous implementation of constitutional mandate on optional religious instruction. Optional religious instruction was decreed as a constitutional mandate not so much for the benefit or support of any particular sect or system of religion as for the development and upbuilding of moral standard and moral values of the public school pupils with the end in view of producing straight-thinking, morally upright, and God-fearing citizens of the nation.

4. The Role of Women in Philippine Social Life

a. Woman may be allowed to extend her intellectual world to the farthest horizons possible to her talents and visions. She may be allowed to stay in office, but only as she can consider that office an extension of the home; in the laboratory but only as she can regard that laboratory a projection of the home. When the day's work is over, she must be back to the warmth of the family circle and continue lending substance and color to the hundred and one dreams she took on the threshold of womanhood.

b. She can even project her role into the social and political movements of the day, but she should keep her escutcheon untarnished, unscathed, and unsoiled, and in the idealism of Fr. Modesto de Castro in his "Ubana at Felisa," of Emilio Jacinto in his "Kartilya ng Katipunan," or Apolinario Mabini in his "El Verdadero Decalogo," she should always be the ministrant, radiating light thru the gloom, and the dispenser of sympathy, tolerance, and understanding.

c. History is replete with events that women have been saviors of mankind: Deborah saved Israel. Judith saved Betulia, Veturia save Rome, Saint Joan liberated France. These women were the saviors of cities and kingdom. With the magic of holy tenderness, woman can restore peace to the tormented souls and the divided cities. Her smile can be the reward for him who conquers hate within himself and her pity can be the healing comfort of every sorrow; her beauty the inspiration for less transitory beauties.

To the extreme limits of her strength she should always remain to be redeemer of the people, be collaborator of God, and an ally in the imminent war of love against terror.

5. Parents Teachers Association In Public Education

The PTA because it often shares in defraying some expenses for school administration should have an articulate voice in making suggestions as to how the schools should be run. There is no doubt that the parents should have a hand in the shaping of educational policies which affects the future and the very lives of their children. Taking such a hand would only be an exercise of such right and fulfillment of their duty under the Constitution to choose the type and kind of education that they desire their children to have.

6. Higher Learning and The Community

The institution of higher learning should be aware of the national problems and must contribute its share in solving them. The college or university in the Philippines is a part of the Philippine scene, part of the Philippine life. It should influence, as is surely influenced by what is happening about it— it should influence as it is influenced by the social and spiritual climate of its local. This interaction between the institution of higher learning and the community in which it operates is the prime test of the effectiveness with which any particular institution is achieving its purpose and performing its function as such. The university sends out into its environment trained individuals who should meet the problems and issues of our contemporary economy and democratic society in the light of sound and tested views and principles.

7. The School and The National Economy

a. The role of vocational and technical education is to bolster the economy of the country. To it are entrusted the human resources of the nation, whose vitality, vision, courage, and perseverance will determine whether or not that economy shall be vigorous with a life of its own, resourceful and responsive to the requirements of independent nationhood in a competitive world, — or shall continue to be sustained artificially on foreign aid, the privileged free exchange of its raw materials with the products of a highly industrialized nation thousands of miles away.

b. To strengthen and invigorate our economy today we must realize that we must build up within itself a capacity to resist the economic avitaminosis which past colonial practices have inflicted upon it. We must realize that like a sick man our economy cannot continually depend upon transfusions from outside sources. To overcome the economic leukemia from which it is suffering it must produce its own blood. And we must realize that time is running out on us.

c. Vocational education must provide our youth training in the proper appreciation of the dignity of work, in the practical utilization of their manipulative skills, in the development of a passionate desire to contribute in every way they can towards the economic progress of their country. But, of course, we should not forget that over and above such training must come the grounding as it were, in the basic fundamentals of knowledge, in general or liberal education, because we do not aim to turn out from our schools men and women who are but mechanical robots. By purpose and tradition our public schools are committed to turn out good, practical, useful citizens — citizens possessed with all the general impulses of the mind, the heart and the spirit.

8. Tagalog and English

a. It is well known that Tagalog was made the national language by legislative enactment during the period of the Commonwealth, and that is being taught as such in all our schools, public and private. The fact that we are required by law to use it, the late Secretary advocated that a truly national language must register not only thought, but the intimate and inimitable texture and pattern, which a people gives to its thinking; not only ideas, but that unique stress, balance and tension with which the national genius organizes its ideas.

If it were merely a question of using English as a purely utilitarian instrument of trade and diplomacy, it may not be necessary to retain it as the general medium of instruction in our schools. It would suffice to teach it as a special skill to selected students who intend to enter professions involving contacts with other nations. But English is far more important to Filipinos than that. We are a people, that for good or ill have incorporated into our national life the key ideas and values of western culture, not merely on a utilitarian but on a much broader human basis.

9. The Public Schools in Leadership Development

a. What we urgently need today are men — good, wise men, strong men — leaders in short who can point to us where we are to go, and what we must do to get there.

b. Where will our country find such men? The most natural logical place to look is in our schools, our public schools; graduates of public schools. For the public schools of the nation are operated at the people's expense; and they are different from other school graduates, that a large part of their education has been paid for by the people. The people then, have every right to look for its leaders from among them.

c. It is precisely during these times when we need men of indestructible moral fiber, men, who by their example can contribute mightily to the moral re-

generation of our youth, men who will furnish our government with men who cannot be bought and cannot be influenced against the commonweal. These are the men who can point out to us the road we are to tread, and how we are to get that road. Of intellectual leaders we have indeed so many, but the burning need today is more leaders of unquestioned honesty and unsullied integrity.

10. The Training of Teachers

a. Teaching methods and techniques are dead, inert things, unless life can be infused into them by the personality of the teachers. The minds of the young and their souls, are not shaped and formed exclusively by methods and techniques administered indifferently both by the worthy and the unworthy. These minds and souls grow by contact with the person and personality of the teacher. This is the contact that will start the potencies and the capacities of the child into development and realization.

b. To insure proper education for the youth, those intending to become teachers must be given the best education that can be had both in the special duties of the profession as well as those pertaining to teachers' more general information as a human being. They must be screened carefully to weed out those who cannot come up to the exacting standards of the general and scientific training which will make teacher education synonymous with culture; be placed in contact with the most energetic, intellectual currents of the day; be made aware of the social problems of his age of his country plus the solid principles of truth and patriotism which may be applied to their solution; be given a breadth and a depth of vision that can see life steadily and see it whole; be developed in strength of will and passionate personal love of virtue and righteousness so that they may stand unshaken amid the tawdry temptations which destroy weaker men; and be presented to the nation and parents whose children (they) shall train, only after (they have) undergone this intensive, severe and solid training.

c. The people could not be expected to respect the dignity of the teaching profession if they could not respect the men who engage in the profession.

d. The establishment of better living conditions for teachers and those who train them, is an important factor in strengthening the leadership role of teacher education for better living.

11. Development of Home Industries

a. The schools are to spear-head and sustain the development of home industries and constitute vital cogs in the machinery of the program. We can profit immeasurably from the experience of other countries like Japan, for example, where particularly every ru-

ral home is engaged in one kind of industry or another, where almost every community which processes the raw materials needed by the individual home factories, and where in every locality where there are home industries, there is said to be a "co-operative merchant" into which all the products of such industries are channeled.

b. Our public schools should help our people put into gainful use the resources available in their immediate environment in the case of our farmers, to utilize to profitable advantage the slack hours in between their planting and harvesting seasons. For unless the schools have such enthusiasm, it will be next to fruitfulness to lead our people in the rural areas to the promised land in the matter of building up family economy.

c. Remember that we are doers only to the extent that we have developed the will to work — a will that is not of the ningaskugon type but of the steady sort — and can assess fully our individual abilities, utilize them in productive deeds, and create and originate and build, or again that we are free men and free women only in the degree to which we possess and practice the tools of knowledge and the vigorous techniques of action.

12. The Community School for Preserving Democracy

a. Our social system is irrevocably committed to the democratic way of life. We believe in the dignity of man, in the individual worth of every human being. We maintain that every person is entitled to an opportunity to acquire, chiefly by his own efforts, a share of the wealth of his country and the various other things, tangible and intangible, that would permit him to have a richer and more satisfying life.

b. We must make democracy function in all phases of living in our country. We must translate into reality the moral and spiritual values of the worth of man — what he is entitled as an individual in a democratic system. And this cannot be done unless he is given the means to improve his standard of living. Democracy will fail where a few wallow in comfort while many are in want.

c. The community school must be developed as a potent instrument for progress and all possible resources must be sought to give it continuing power and potentiality. Only thus can it accomplish its fundamental task of strengthening democracy in our country.

d. There is no better instrument than the community school for promoting democracy, not by merely preaching its virtues but by concerted efforts on its part to improve the living conditions of the masses.

13. The Revised Educational Program of 1957

A revitalized and enriched program for all levels in the country's educational system is expected to take effect this coming school year. The program embodies the fundamental objectives of education as approved by the policy making board of national education. It proposes a revised and improved curriculum for the elementary and secondary education, sets forth to raise the standards for admission to college, places emphasis on vocational education and strengthens adult education along the national program of rural improvement. Likewise, it envisions the full implementation of an existing law providing for the compulsory enrolment of all children of school age and seeks to restore eventually the seventh grade.

As embodied in the order, the following revisions will be effected in the elementary school:

1. The vernacular where the school is located would be used as medium of instruction in Grades I and II in all public and private schools.

2. Strong practical community schools would be developed and local school administrators would be allowed ample discretion in the development of their curriculum.

3. Double-single classes would be converted into full-day sessions as soon as facilities would permit.

4. Class sizes would be reduced from 60 pupils per class to a maximum of 40 only to insure greater assimilation of lessons.

5. Introduction of the national language as a subject of instruction in Grade I, with increasing emphasis placed on it in the higher grades.

6. In the first and second grades of the elementary school English shall be introduced informally as a subject. Beginning Grade III English shall be used as medium of instruction with the vernacular as auxiliary medium in the intermediate and high schools.

On the secondary level the curriculum makes special provision for those who desire to study further for the industries. Should the student not study further, he is expected to have acquired a secondary education that will help him to live more efficiently and effectively as a citizen. The specific provisions are the following:

1. A common general curriculum for all students in the first and second years, and differentiated curriculum in the third and fourth years leading to either a college or to a technical vocational course.

2. The curriculum of each school should provide vocational courses geared to the occupations, resources and industries of the community or region where the school is located.

3. Part of the training should be given in school shops and school farms with school laboratories as pilot and demonstration centers; and part on the farms or shops, factories and stores wherever these are available.

4. Emphasis should be given the teaching of sciences and mathematics as preparations of those students who may desire to continue their studies in the colleges and universities.

The above plans are intended to be implemented thru gradual stages. For the school year 1957-1958, only those parts of the program affecting the first year are expected to be carried out. The second, third, and fourth years will continue under the old curriculum and will be shifted to the new ones gradually. This new educational program probably would take five years, at most, to become fully implemented. With adequate funds, it would take less time to realize.

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The foregoing expressions of educational policies that are made of record in Department orders, and in circulars and memorandums of the Bureau of Public Schools and Bureau of Private Schools are there to endure for all to read and ponder upon. They may be likened to the bold and bright strokes of a painter that concretize his conception of an educated Filipino under the full impact of a well designed school system. For it is the individual that is the immediate beneficiary of an improved school system whose benefits he bequeaths in the end to his country as the life and blood that sustains its institution, determines its national life and characterizes its culture.

The Filipino as well as his country is ever in the making. Their inseparable development is envisioned in the educational design which the late Secretary carved on the tablet of time. New reformers and builders of the Philippine educational system will refer to this pattern as the first expression of a total concept of Philippine education that is truly integrated, nationalistic, and democracy-inspired. Here is a vision of Philippine education that is not segmented, but one that interprets Philippine life as a whole with its rich heritage and the promise of even a richer future.