

- This article was published in the Philippines Herald on July 11, 1965, a day after Dr. Tan's article appeared in Manila Times now reproduced at page 21 in this issue.

## QUALITY IN EDUCATION NOT GRADE SEVEN

During the last month or so Manila City authorities have been publicizing their plan to revive the 7th Grade in the City elementary schools. The idea seems to have the acquiescence of some officials of the Department of Education and the backing of an editorial or two in Manila newspapers. Their stand is made to rest on a simple assumption or belief that the revival of the 7th Grade will improve the standard of Manila schools and will raise the educational competence of the school children. Improving education is obviously a laudable ambition and a very desirable goal to reach. Unfortunately, however, no one has yet defined what exactly is the standard of education they have in mind and what educational competence they have in view. An assumption such as this could be illusory, and in the field of public education the best of intentions has many a time caused disappointments and frustrations which may mean wasteful expenditures of the people's money. In fact during all these years of glib talk about excellence, no authoritative party has yet given a concrete definition of the national standard of education which our schools should strive to reach. No announcement has been advanced as to what tangible and reliable measuring rod should be used to ascertain that any of them has successfully attained to that standard. There was an attempt on the part of our Department of Education to do this in the form of the national examination

for students in secondary schools, but for some unexplained reasons that was given up.

But last Sunday we were much pleased to read a statement expressing good sense and sound judgment from the pen of Mr. M. A. Gaerlan of the *Philippines Herald* which runs as follows:

“Judging from the impatience of some city authorities to restore the Seventh Grade in the public elementary course, one would think that simply tagging on a new grade would solve the problem of improving the system. When one comes down right to it, restoring the Seventh Grade isn't really half as important as improving the present methods of instruction in the six other grades. The emphasis, as we see it, must be on the quality of instruction, rather than on its duration.”

In this brief paragraph, Mr. Gaerlan has succinctly expressed the essential element required for the solution of our chief educational problem. It is quality of instruction that is needed; and Mr. Gaerlan is right that this is not attainable by merely adding one year to the present 6-year elementary course. As a matter of fact, the poor quality of the products of our elementary schools were pointed out in the Monroe Survey Report way back in 1925 when the elementary curriculum precisely included a Seventh Grade. That Report categorically stated “that the quality of instruction in the primary and intermediate schools is now so deficient by reason of the lack of *proper* teacher training, that a period of reduction in the number of schools will be preferable to a continuation of the present condition.” Let us note the word *proper* in describing the kind of training teachers should have. Of course, as we grow older we tend to have nostalgic moments in recalling our so-called good old days when every-

thing, not excluding educational standards and our own achievement, seemed much better than what they are now. Unfortunately, the objective record of findings based on cold facts oftentimes contradict our pleasant memories. The plain truth is that our public education has already been considered unsatisfactory since 40 years ago even when we had the 7th Grade. The Report made many specific recommendations for improving the work of our public schools, among the most important of which was that of employing a *properly-trained* teaching force and an effective method of instruction.

In the 41st annual report of the Director of Education for the year 1939-1940, we find a statement that two committees composed of a number of public school superintendents, principals, and supervisors submitted to the Director reports showing that after 15 years, only 47 recommendations of the Monroe Survey Report of 1925 had been more or less followed but that 29 of them could not be carried out for lack of funds. The Director's 1940 report did not specify which recommendations of the Monroe commission had been followed and which were not. One thing is sure, however, and that is that the recommendation for teacher improvement was not. On this subject, the Director stated: "The problem of securing a sufficient number of professionally trained teachers is discussed in detail in the Director's Annual Report for 1938. This pressing problem was not solved during the year under review" (1940). The Director then mentioned that for new classes, about 64 per cent of the teachers had no professional training and more than 50 per cent of the regular elementary teachers were not also professionally trained. (p. 15) It clearly appears, therefore, that even immediately before the last War the education of most of our children was poor considering that the presence of poor and unprepared

teachers, which the Monroe Report pointed out as one of the chief causes of the inadequate educational achievement of Filipino children, still existed.

Of course, after the War and to this day, the number of inefficient teachers still appears high in spite of the thousands of new B.S.E.'s for it is generally known that degrees awarded in many teachers colleges are not much better than mere certifications of college attendance rather than a recognition of marked academic accomplishment. Their instruction has often been superficial and their curriculum deals more with methods (how to teach) than with content or substance of learning (what to teach). This is not exactly the kind of teacher preparation the Monroe commission had suggested when it said; "Knowledge of subject matter to be taught, on a level well above that to which pupils are to be carried, is fundamental." Even the Swanson Report of 1959 criticized the excess of professional or method courses in the normal college or education college curriculum by giving this suggestion: "The number of hours devoted to professional educational courses, while it has been reduced, is still considerably more extensive than the number required in many first-class teachers colleges and colleges of education in reputable universities. There are many things a teacher must know, but they all cannot be learned on the undergraduate level. Some can be saved for graduate school; others will be learned on the job. . . It is suggested that the total number of professional education courses be reduced by *at least ten semester hours.*"

It is a regrettable fact that, with few exceptions, education students in general do not come from the group of young people of high intelligence and ambition. This may be explained by the fact that salaries of elementary teachers and the social status

they often occupy are not sufficiently attractive to most young and bright individuals. Higher salaries, better educational standards for teachers, and non-interference by friends and politicians in their appointment and promotion can well change this attitude to be found among highly qualified students toward teaching jobs. Another reason is the "softness" of education courses. The bright student feels that education college subjects and standards are not tough enough to challenge to the utmost their mental capacity.

One has only to pick at random some of the B.S.E. products of normal schools and colleges of education and to engage them in a discussion of simple educational or cultural problems to discover the inadequacy of their learning and their English language deficiency. How then could they improve the quality of the education of the children in their charge? They themselves in many case could be the poor products of inadequately prepared teachers.

It is absurd to lay the blame for the inferior education of elementary school children on the fact that they have only six years of schooling. In most European schools, the elementary education is and has always been from only four to six years. In Russia, after a child has finished the first four years of elementary education he is immediately admitted into the high school if he could pass the test. In England, the eleven-year old child who passes the so-called 11-plus examination goes either to the secondary modern school or the grammar school depending on his examination rating. In Switzerland a child stays from four years (Basle and Berne) to six years (Geneva, Zurich) in the common or elementary school, and thereafter the brighter ones, about 60 per cent, leave for the secondary school and the poor ones continue for the duration of a longer

compulsory education. In France the elementary education for all French children is a four-year basic training. Before this reform was introduced the elementary school was 6 years consisting of *cours elementaire* (ages 7 to 9), the *cours moyen* (ages 9-11), and the *cours superieur* (ages 11-13). They usually begin their secondary education at age eleven or twelve.

In Italy elementary education lasts five years. This is followed by a 3-year secondary school of about the same level as the American junior high school or the British secondary modern school. In Sweden, the elementary course is four years for the better type of students and six years for ordinary ones. The first may enter the secondary course after the fourth grade (age 11), and the others after the sixth grade (age 13). The very poor pupils may stay one or more years in elementary school and may thereafter attend what they call a continuation school.

In Denmark common schooling extends to age 11. The children after 11 to 15 may be admitted in the academic secondary school if considered eligible after an examination or he may stay in an extended elementary school which is terminal or may lead to a technical school. In Norway children attend elementary school from age 7 to 14 and then enter a modern high school of 3 years duration or the gymnasium of 5 years. The first two years in both schools are common.

In post-War Japan, the elementary education is six years, followed by a lower secondary education of 3 years, and then by a high secondary of 3 years. University education is 4 years. This system is obviously similar to the American which was practically imposed during the MacArthur military administration of that country.

The elementary education in Mexico is for 6 years. This is followed by a high school (*escuela secundaria*) of three years, and then by a two-year university preparatory school. The plan recommended by the Committee of the National Board of Education for the reorganization of the Philippine educational system in 1960-1961 is built on a similar framework. But the changes of the administration of the country after the 1961 general elections prevented the final consideration of that plan.

It may thus be seen that in most of the advanced countries today, including the U.S.A., elementary education is not longer than six years. It should be said in passing that where the learning ability of children is not underestimated, their elementary education is of shorter duration. The vanishing 8-year elementary school in America was the product of the theory and belief among parents and educators of the past that American children with their tender bodies and minds should not be pushed too hard but should be allowed, so to say, to take it easy by simplifying the elementary curriculum and letting the children stay for 8 years in elementary schools. This was a departure from the generally accepted idea and practice in the European schools. Realizing this condition, American educators in many states reduced the duration of the elementary school from 8 to 6 years; but still thinking that the children after the 6 years are not yet fully adolescent they have adopted the junior high school idea. On the other hand, Russia reduced further the 6-year elementary education to only 4 years which is followed by a 6-year secondary education. One of the leading American educators, Fred M. Hechinger, commented on this action with these remarks; "Is this a weakness? Is it only a temporary expedient?... The answer is *no*. The four-year elementary school is neither weakness nor expedient. Based on observation in Europe, the Russians have

good reason to be convinced that four years of grade school is sufficient. They probably feel that an extension of elementary education beyond those four years would be a waste of time, a watering down." And he adds: "There is a growing feeling, even among more conventional educators, that the American school has permitted elementary school to be strung out too long and to spread itself too thin. Since much — if not most — of the grade school program is devoted to the teaching of the basic skills, the question is whether a shortening of the stretch would not improve rather than weaken the over-all fabric of education."

If a longer time is really necessary for an elementary education or for a secondary school training in our country, an additional year for a 7th Grade is not the most practical, economical, and sensible answer. All that our schools should do is to lengthen the academic year and to do away with frills in the school curriculum. The present system now followed in our country is an *academic year* of 180 days out of the 360-365 days of the full *calendar year*. This means that more than 180 days are actually wasted or unutilized for school purposes. It is even more because we are foolishly observing an unusually large number of official holidays. In Switzerland and other European continental countries the school year is 240 days or more. They have a 6-day school week with 2 afternoon offs. So for every year, they have at least 60 days more of schooling than we have. This means that when one reaches the 6th grade, he has had 300 days of school work more than what is covered in our schools by our children; and at the end of 6 years, the Swiss child has had 360 days more schooling than the Filipino child. On the basis of our school year of 180 days, the European child who finishes his 6-year



elementary study has been kept in school for as long as a Filipino student who has completed the 2nd year of his high school; and as he has more competent teachers and a well-planned curriculum, his educational achievement is easily equal to that of our students in the 2nd or 3rd year high school.

To recapitulate, low standards cannot be raised by merely lengthening the course. Institutional standards are one thing and course duration is another. To improve the education of our youth, what is needed is improvement of the standards of our schools beginning with the kindergarten or the first grade to the end of whatever course a child has to pursue.

Educational standards may be improved only by employing excellent teachers, effective teaching procedures, sensible curricula, students who are in school to study, a public who understands and appreciates what education is, and employers, whether government officials or private capitalists, who know how to reward employees with superior education and ability. These are incentives which could encourage our children to work hard for quality education.

Education and schooling are too different things. Most parents do not seem to realize the distinction. They believe that as long as their children attend school, they are being educated. They do not try to find out what the young people are actually doing within it — whether they are learning or merely playing. They mistake grades and diplomas for learning. They believe that the longer their children are kept in school, the better their education will be. This is the belief underlying the idea that the es-

establishment of the 7th Grade is a guarantee for better education. This is wrong. An hour of conscientious study under the guidance of a qualified teacher who is interested in his work and his pupil is more fruitful to the child than ten hours of idle activity under a poorly educated and permissive teacher who is not much better than a baby-sitter. — *V. G. Sinco.*

### CRITICS AND MISTAKES

The galleries are full of critics. They play no ball. They fight no fights. They make no mistakes because they attempt many things.

Ford forgot to put a reverse gear into his first automobile. Edison once spent \$2,000,000 on an invention which proved of little value.

The man who makes no mistakes lacks boldness and the spirit of adventure. He is the one who never tries anything. He is the brake on the wheel of progress.

And yet it cannot be truly said he makes no mistakes because the biggest mistake is the very fact that he tries nothing, does nothing but criticize those who do things. — *Pittsylvania Star.*