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OUR PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

Dr. Vicente G. Sinco

WE NEED to remind ourselves that nothing could be more vital and more critical to a democracy than education. A dictatorship or an oligarchy can afford to be unmindful of the intellectual condition of the people within its orbit. But the reality of a genuine democratic system of government and society, the system we have decided to adopt, is not possible without education. And when we speak of education for a democracy, we mean intellectual upbringing designed not merely for an elite or a chosen few, not even for a larger group such as a privileged political party, but all citizens. The validity of this statement may be easily confirmed by the cases we see at present in the countries which have

lately become independent states in Asia and in Africa where the spirit of nationalism fomented by a mere handful of individuals has precipitated their political separation from the colonial powers without adequate administrative training and educational preparation. Much as we sympathize with them in their desire for independence, in moments of serious reflection we cannot help but view with deep apprehension the undesirable conditions, the state of disorder, perplexity, confusion, and even suffering they find themselves in. We can only hope that having been thrown into the sea of political manumission all by themselves they might manage to learn how to swim before they sink and get drowned.

In expressing these thoughts of apprehension, it is not our purpose to assume an attitude and position of superiority. For while in some respects we have indeed attained a certain level of education and a sufficiently widespread literacy, oftentimes we are assailed by doubts whether or not the educational competence of our people as a whole has reached the degree necessary to create an atmosphere, a climate, that could invigorate the processes of democracy in our country and could thus insure the enjoyment of the rights and blessing that go with it. We do not need to be profound observers to detect a considerable amount of weak spots in our present system, not so much in its formal framework as it is in the implementation of the essential methods and practices which are the real determinants of a democracy.

The education that is needed to strengthen democratic institutions is not merely quantitative but also qualitative. It is not necessarily acquired by the establishment and operation of a multitude of schools and colleges. If the instruction in these institutions is inadequate and inferior in quality, mere numbers do not have much significance. On the contrary, it may only deceive us and give us a false sense of satisfaction. We are well acquainted with the rapid multiplication of the number of graduates from educational institutions awarding diplomas and degrees in different professions and occupations — from teachers, stenographers, secretaries, and lawyers, to engineers, doctors of medicine, ar-

chitects, pharmacists, etc. In many cases, these diplomas are not much better than mere certificates of attendance over a certain number of years in the colleges issuing them. They are far from being reliable evidence of quality education their holders received.

Let there be no mistake about this: that the problem of education in our country cannot be solved by merely increasing the number of schools, colleges, and universities, and by making it possible for them to increase the number of pupils, students, and teachers. The problem cannot be considered solved until there is a definite improvement in the quality of instruction and in the educational competence resulting from it.

It is safe to say that the percentage of persons going to our schools and colleges has been increasing rapidly every year since the end of the last War. But it is also safe to say that the quality of instruction and education that these persons have been receiving during the same period of time has been deteriorating almost as fast as the increase of their number No wonder that in the report of a group of American and Filipino educators that made a survey of our educational system a little over a year ago under the chairmanship of Prof. J. Chester Swanson of the University of California, we find these words: "Much of the education of the Philippines is simply not good enough to justify the great faith of the people. What will happen to this unquestioning faith in education when the people learn that it is not solving their problems? Will they lose faith in education or in those who are responsible for their educational services?"

Those of us who are neither too proud nor too self-centered to accept honest and objective criticisms have to admit the validity of this uncomplimentary statement. We have to admit that the quality of the education that the large majority of our children have been receiving has not been good enough. It has deteriorated, I repeat, since the second World War; and the deterioration has been rapid and alarming. We have not taken so far any determined step to arrest it. No wonder that the report of this mixed group of educators has this suggestion to make: "Educators must work to provide a public school

program good enough to prove that faith in education is justified. This will require not only providing good schools, but also creating in the public an understanding of the difference between good and poor schools."

There are several causes of this state of educational deterioration in our country today. One of them may be the insufficiency of funds made available for our educational program. Undoubtedly, much can be done to raise educational standards if appropriations for educational development be set aside in larger amounts. But like investments in business or in industry, their size does not always guarantee success if funds are mishandled, misused, and misdirected. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that a study of the system, the personnel, and the materials involved be seriously and intelligently undertaken in order to avoid as much as possible not only financial losses but also unnecessary wastage in time, attention, and effort; and what is more, in order to prevent disillusionment and frustration in our faith in education as the firm foundation of individual and social development.

Public opinion is extremely important for any successful implementation of any program of educational improvement. It must be articulate, insistent, intelligently directed, and courageous. It should aim at creating public appreciation of efforts to raise the quality or standards of our schools and colleges. Such appreciation should be expressed frankly, openly, and sincerely, not in mere words but in deeds, in action, and in decisions. The cooperation of all parents, businessmen, industrialists, and all other elements of the community has to be actively given if we are sincere in our belief that our social, political, economic, and moral betterment depends largely upon education.

There has been no well-directed and strong public opinion on the problem of good and desirable education in our country. This is shown by the fact that what is almost invariably considered by the press as a crisis in education is the usual delay in accommodating the 800 thousand or more children in the public schools in June. When the Department of Education gives the usual assurance that additional classes would be open, the so-

called crisis in education is considered solved and ended. To call such condition as a crisis in education is a gross exaggeration. The real crisis in the education of this country consists in the steady decline of the effectiveness of our schools and colleges in maintaining reasonably good standards of teaching and learning.

Unless the basic causes of this state of educational impoverishment are correctly recognized and arrested, no amount of financial assistance will be of much help in improving our educational work. One of these causes has reference to the character and content of the curriculum. Another cause concerns the qualifications of our teachers. The third has relation to the attitude, and interest of our youth in work and study.

Any intelligent and objective analysis of our educational problem is bound to discover these three factors as among the most basic causes of the weakness of our educational program and of the inferior academic record of the great majority of our students. There are, however, a few schools that have been turning out fine products in spite of handicaps arising from the excessive centralization of our educational system. They have been able to remedy to a certain extent these basic defects. Their record shows that with a well qualified teaching staff and with the proper motivation, discipline, and determination on the part of the school authorities, there can be no question that the youth of the nation will acquire a superior type of education. The young Filipino has the capa-

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BREVITY

The best illustration of the value of brief speech reckoned in dollars was given by Mark Twain. His story was that when he had listened for five minutes to the preacher telling of the heathen, he wept, and was going to contribute fifty dollars; after ten minutes more of the sermon, he reduced the amount of his prospective contribution to twenty-five dollars; after half an hour more of eloquence, he cut the sum to five dollars. At the end of an hour of oratory when the plate was passed, he stole two dollars.

city for acquiring it. What he needs is proper stimulation to awaken that potentaility in him for better performance.

But before discussing these basic causes of the weakness of our school system and its educational efforts, I should like to bring to your attention the significance of the problem of education today. Time and again we have told ourselves that the most valuable resources of our country are our human resources — our people; just like our abundant natural resources. they have to be correctly cultivated in order to draw out from them the best qualities in their possession. Today we live in an age of intensive development in science and technology which are causing tremendous changes not only in our conditions of living but also in our ideas and in our attitudes in life and work. The nation that cannot keep up with the rapid strides of advanced countries will have to face more numerous and more complicated problems affecting its economic, social, and political conditions. Such problems as unemployment, standard of living, economic and social stability, population explosion, food supply, public sanitation and health, and peace and order may well become threats to the security and even to the very existence itself of a nation as an independent political unit. They have to be solved not in the distant future but at the present time or during this generation.

These considerations render the problem of educational improvement for our people a matter of transcendent importance. Any postponement in the adoption of practicable solutions to this problem will make it more and more difficult and will increase our inertia to imperative changes. Let us bear in mind that educational stagnation neutralizes and even defeats in the long run movements of improvement in practically all the other phases of the nation's life and work. We are about to reach what modern economists call the take-off stage of economic development. We have reached a point when our industrial development is quite well started. But that encouraging growth of our industrial and economic life is bound to be slowed down if not aborted and arrested unless we pay much attention

to the problem of the educational improvement of our people.

It is not enough that we talk about education. That is the easiest thing to do. As a matter of fact when it comes to the subject of education in conversation or speech-making almost every one seems to talk as an expert and feels qualified to express critical opinions on college methods, university programs, and academic activities without having seen actual academic performance nor understood educational objectives nor read and studied books and publications on current educational practices and theories produced by learned scholars and experienced educators. To pass judgment on the work of our educational institutions, we need to be deeply involved in the study of educational problems. We need to participate actively in tasks or activities of individuals or groups regularly engaged in serious educational work. Otherwise, judgments and criticisms based on half-baked ideas or obsolete practices are likely to produce more harm than good.

It does not seem to be widely known among our people today that a great deal of interest and deep concern in the problem of educational improvement are being taken in all progressive countries today. Let us take for example the United States. In spite of its leadership in the field of industry and economic activities and of the excellent work of its colleges and universities, its leaders, not only in educationa itself but also in politics, in business, and in civic and religious affairs, are nevertheless very much concerned with the quality of the education that the young Americans have been receiving over the years. They realize that education cannot stand still without affecting the welfare and improvement of the nation. Beginning with President Truman, clear through President Eisenhower, and down to President Kennedy commissions and committees have been formed for the purpose of analysing the conditions of American schools, their teachers, their academic and technical courses, their methods of instruction, and their policies. They are determined to discover whatever weakness exists in the products of their educational practices. National as well as local surveys have been undertaken and reports of the results of such surveys have

been published so the people could be fully informed. The reports are live subjects of private and public discussions in large and small conferences, in newspapers, and in radio and TV programs. All these activities indicate the intense interest of the people of the most powerful country in the world today in the value and the urgent need of being constantly aware of the swift changes of educational ideas and methods. There is more than mere fear and apprehension of the Russian advances in science and technology shown by leaders of the United States in their intense concern with the quality of the education of the American youth. There is a deep realization on their part that in this age of revolutionary changes the country that is satisfied with what it has today will be left far behind tomorrow. Its economic, social, political, and other problems assume new aspects and it is only through the improvement of education that these could find satisfactory solutions.

We in our country, on the other hand, do not seem to be keenly apprehensive of the condition of our educational institutions. Our leaders have not been deeply disturbed by the poor educational performance of our youth in general. We do not seem to be worried over the large number of young men and women who finish the high school and even the college course without knowing enough of the subjects they are supposed to have taken. We do not seem to mind that many of these graduates do not even know how to read with comprehension or to do multiplication and division. Our attention is absorbed in politics and elections. Even these reflect the low educational level of most of our electorate. Issues are absent. The struggle for public offices is carried out on the basis of personal attacks, exposure of private faults, and accusations of alleged moral delinquencies and puerile comparisons of individual school achievements. While we should elect only the able and the honest to public posts, it is sheer childishness and political immaturity to have oneself elected by an appeal to personal prejudice and hatred of one candidate against another. Democracy is not intended for the illiterate, the moron, and the feeble minded. Neither is it intended for the sage and the philosopher alone. It is in-

tended for the man who is sufficiently educated so that he can with understanding, appreciate whatever is excellent in life, and is able and willing to use his mind and do his own choosing. To keep and maintain it, the people should worry about education, superior education.

Coming now to the causes that have retarded our educational development as pointed out by competent observers, we should mention first of all the defective curriculum of our schools in general. It is defective not in its quantitative aspect but in its superabundance of subjects and activities, some good, others indifferent, and still others useless. Too many subjects clog and confuse the mind of the student, producing what might amount to something like mental suffocation.

Without going into the details of the solution of this problem, all I can say at this moment is that the improvement of the curriculum calls for a reduction of the number of subjects it contains to those that are most essential in developing the power to understand and to think according to the different stages of a person's intellectual maturity. As all men and women of experience know, no more effective way of learning is the process of *taking one thing at a time.* Concentration is needed in every task and activity that requires mental or physical effort. For this reason the British scholar and mathematician, Alfred North Whitehead, made this significant statement: *"In all modern educational reforms the watchword must be concentration."* The improvement of the curriculum therefore is best achieved by limiting its content to the basic subjects needed for the cultivation of the intellectual competence of the student. For we should all understand that education does not consist in the accumulation of more information in one's memory, but rather in learning how to think and how to arrive at pertinent conclusions. While we need materials which are necessary in the process of thinking, and while it is necessary that such materials be of high quality, their acquisition may be easily left to the mind that has learned how to learn.

Superior education is not possible without superior teachers. Our educational problem has reached a criti-

cal stage simply because the great majority of our schools and colleges have not had a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers. A large proportion of the teachers now employed in our schools are not competent enough to produce good students. They are graduates of schools of education that emphasize methods of teaching and pay scant attention to learning subject matter. It is quite obvious that one cannot give what he does not have, no matter how much he knows the method of giving. The good teacher should not only have the *know-how* but also the *know-what* and the *know-why*.

It goes without saying that to improve the education of our youth good teachers are indispensable. To produce them there is need for change and modification in the system of education for our teachers. Consequently, some time and much effort are needed before we could hope to transform our educational institutions today into centers adequately equipped to improve the quality of the instruction for our youth. The improvement of the curriculum is not as difficult as raising the quality of instructon. The curriculum does not work automatically. Without well qualified teachers, the curriculum is of very little use.

The third cause of the deterioration of the educational performance of our students proceeds from the character, the habits, and the attitudes of a large portion of our youth. The general complaint of our teachers and professors in our university is that a large number of our students do not study; they do not spend enough time to prepare their lessons before coming to class. Study is work, mental work.

There are times when I feel that this aversion on the part of our students to mental work might be attributable to the idea propagated by some educationists that work experience is gained only through manual work and physical exertion. There are moments when I suspect that this aversion to mental effort on the part of many students, especially those coming from the public schools, might be the effect of the so-called *activity method* which stresses the pragmatic principle of learning by doing and even by playing. Professor Brand Blanshard of Yale University commenting on this princi-

ple stated: "We are all pragmatists from five to ten. But I am inclined to think that a person who is still a pragmatist at forty is suffering from arrested development. A person who limits the fruits of the spirit to those that that can be tested in action is not so much freeing himself from older dogmaticism as fettering himself by a new one." And I should add that education is a fruit of the spirit.

The development of the mind is not something that can take place by the mere presence of a good teacher, by the mere possession of proper books and other nistructional materials, by the mere attendance of the students in the classroom, and to wait for the teacher to pour the precious liquid of knowledge into his empty brain, after which he could go out and be ready to pour the needed amount of learning into the job he has selected for himself or into the problem he meets in life. Education is more like a process of developing the muscles or of building up the skill of a prospective athlete so that he could win a prize or at least make a good showing in a contest.

To repeat, many of our students today come to their classes without spending even an hour in preparing their lessons. And there are many among us parents who complain when their sons and daughters have to observe class schedules that demand even only a modicum amount of preparation or else flunk in their subjects. This is a problem that serious-minded educators and responsible citizens of our country should frankly face; and they should welcome gladly every requirement prescribed for its solution. For it involves more than the mere fulfillment of academic duties. It involves the fundamental need of developing the habit of work, diligence, persistence, and the quality of moral stamina and even physical endurance. It is this dicipline of work, purposeful ~~work, that quality~~ education requires and encourages. That is why quality education inevitably produces men of character, not weaklings, persons of integrity, not drones, parasites, or grafters.

These problems have faced our Board of National Education in its work of planning a program of educational improvement suitable to the needs of our nation.

After the completion of the survey of our public schools undertaken by the mixed group of American and Filipino educators I refered to a while ago, the Board created a committee in May, 1960, to study the possibility of reorganizing the entire Philippine educational system. That committee met practically every week from July, 1960 until April, 1961, when it rendered its final report to the Board. The membership of the committee consisted of ranking officials from the Department of Education, the University of the Philippines, and outstanding citizens in business. It was assisted by members of the staff of the Bureau of Public Schools and of the Colleges of Education, Arts and Sciences, and Engineering of the University of the Philippines. Its report has been widely published in the different newspapers of this city. The suggestions and recommendations embodied in it have been appreciated by persons interested in the improvement of our educational system and by the press in general. We do not have the time to discuss them in detail at this moment. I shall therefore mention but very briefly the general objectives and the overall organization of the educational system proposed.

The present organizational setup of the elementary school consisting of a four-year primary and a two-year intermediate curriculum is preserved. The reason is that it is an urgent obligation under our Constitution for the government to provide at least free primary instruction and that the actual government budget for the support of our public schools is so limited that to comply with this constitutional mandate it is imperative that unnecessary prolongation of the elementary curriculum should be avoided. The objective of elementary education is to produce *functional literacy.*

The goal of secondary education is *intelligent citizenship. A basic secondary school* of three years is proposed, offering a rounded curriculum of general education which covers only the essential subjects needed by the intelligent citizen. The basic secondary school serves two purposes: One is to provide a terminal course for all those who may not wish to continue their studies. The other is to serve as a foundation for two distinct courses, namely, the *collegiate sec-*

ondary course and the *vocational secondary course.*

The collegiate secondary course, as well as the vocational secondary course, extends over a period of two years. The collegiate secondary course serves as a preparation for college work. The vocational secondary course is intended for the training of moderately skilled workers and craftsmen. For those who desire to improve themselves further, an additional two years of vocational courses are offered, leading to the training of technicians or more highly skilled craftsmen. Then for those who desire to become teachers in vocational schools or to develop themselves into technologists, an additional course of two years in higher technical training is suggested.

The courses for colleges embody two important features. One is the reduction of the number of required subjects to the essentials in mathematics, the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences. The aim is to develop the power to think, to improve the ability to make relevant judgments, as well as to enhance a person's liberal education. The second feature of the suggested college curriculum is flexibility. The purpose of this is to give the authorities of a college a greater degree of freedom in adopting additional courses that they might consider valuable.

To raise standards of university education, the committee suggests that for an institution to be recognized as a university, it must have post graduate courses in natural science, social science, and the humanities; and that it should have at least two thirds of the members of its faculty serving as full-time professors exclusively for the university.

Dr. James B. Conant, former President of Harvard University, not very long ago declared that educational practices are not exportable commodities. Hence, every country should adopt its system and its methods of education that are best suited to its social conditions, its historical traditions, and its varied needs. The validity of these ideas is beyond doubt. But we have, unfortunately in our country, ignored them by adopting a system of education which is a mere imitation or image of the American educational system. That system has its good points but it must have some very poor points otherwise,

the American leaders, as I stated previously, would not have been so apprehensive about improving them. It is high time that we should establish a system of education suitable to us as a distinct people, with limited financial resources, with problems peculiar to our own conditions. We should not forget, however, that in many ways education is universal in character. Therefore, we need to discover and to learn whatever is good in the educational ideas of other countries; then we should import them, if necessary, not, however, through a system of adoption but through a process of adaptation. Thus we may be able to enrich and develop our own.

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NEW BLOOD TEST FOR BODY DISEASES

A simple blood test for diseases of the heart, liver and other body organs based on the identification of enzyme "fingerprints" was described at a recent meeting of the American Chemical Society. The test depends on LDH (lactic dehydrogenase), an enzyme that regulates several important chemical processes in the body, according to medical authorities. LDH occurs in five distinct forms caled isoenzymes, which appear in different proportions in different organs. Clinical tests indicate that when an organ is damaged it releases enzymes into the blood stream. "impressing its LDH isoenzyme pattern on the blood, like an identifiable fingerprint," the authorities explained.

Blood tests can. therefore, serve to identify an injured organ, and they are especially suitable for the detection of heart and liver damage because these LDH patterns differ markedly in their resistance to heat. A large amount of LDH destroyed by heating a sample of the blood serum at a relatively low temperature indicates liver disease while a large proportion of lactic dehydrogenase stable at a relatively high temperature indicates heart damage.