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The Sinco Report

JAMES J. MEANY

IN 1957 the Board of National Education promulgated the Revised Philippine Educational Program. Now, only four years later, a special committee of the same Board has recommended a new and sweeping Reform of the Philippine Educational System.¹ Because of its provisions for the division of the high-school curriculum, the 1957 revision was known as the 2-2 Plan. For similar reasons the 1961 reform could be called the 3-2 Plan. But it has been named after the Chairman of the Committee, President Vicente G. Sinco of the University of the Philippines.

While retaining the six years of elementary schooling now in the public schools and in the majority of private schools, the Sinco plan would divide the secondary-school course into two periods. The first period, of three years, would complete the basic education which every citizen should have; it would be a terminal course for all those who would not continue their studies. The subsequent period, two years in length, would be either a "vocational secondary course" for the training of skilled workers and craftsmen or the "collegiate secondary course" which would prepare the student for college. ("Collegiate secondary" is a confused term but it is the one used by the Sinco committee; "college preparatory" would be the one expected.) The Sinco reform avoids one of the ob-

¹REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE REFORM OF THE PHILIPPINE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. Manila: Board of National Education, 1961. 76 pp.

jectionable features of the original 2-2 Plan in that it would not require every high school to offer all of these courses. A school could limit itself to the basic secondary course or it could add either or both of the advanced two-year courses.

The vocational secondary school would aim at the training of moderately skilled workers and craftsmen. The graduate could then go on to a polytechnic school for training as a senior technician or highly skilled worker. The committee states that "it is possible for a student to shift from one higher secondary school to another should he discover afterwards that his inclination is really for the other type of high-school curriculum." Thus apparently the committee seeks to avoid the objection against the system in some countries, that it almost irrevocably commits the students at an early age to one of the lower occupations and precludes university training. It is difficult to see, however, how a vocational student who conceives a desire to go to college could transfer from the "vocational secondary" to the "collegiate secondary"—unless, of course, he is willing to begin at the beginning. The training in the vocational secondary school, as proposed by the Sinco committee, is highly technical and not calculated to prepare the student for college.

The Sinco Report says that "functional literacy" is the objective of the elementary school. The school should therefore emphasize the acquisition of skills in the three R's. But, somehow or other, the committee manages to include within the scope of this objective such variegated aims as the development of health habits, an understanding of science, awareness of duties, rights and privileges, the foundation of an incorruptible character and adult morality, learning the rudiments of the fine arts and acquaintance with the practical arts!

In the basic secondary school the objective is "intelligent citizenship". The courses designed to accomplish this objective are much the same as in existing high-school curricula with the addition, however, of a heavy schedule of practical and fine arts. More time would be spent in the study of English than under present curricula.

The Revised Philippine Educational Program of 1957 provided for changes only in the elementary and secondary schools. The Board of National Education never did finalize its policies with regard to collegiate and university education. The Sinco Report, however, contains provisions for the reform of colleges and universities.

The Sinco committee states its intention "to provide a flexible curriculum which would answer the needs of institutions of higher education in this country for an opportunity to use their own initiative in developing distinctive offerings." These words fall on welcome ears in private-school circles. They promise a freedom for individual colleges and universities which is noticeably lacking in the Sinco provisions for elementary and secondary-school education.

The committee would require a total minimum load of 60 units in Freshman and Sophomore Years. But true to its intention to provide for a flexible curriculum, it specifies only 36 units of the subjects to be taught in the two years, thus leaving 24 units in "electives" to be determined by each particular college. Opinions will vary even about the wisdom of the committee's choice of required subjects. But the committee's attitude towards curricular freedom is in pleasing contrast to that of the Department of Education which by its curricular requirements leaves little or no latitude to the individual college for the pursuit of its peculiar objectives. The committee leaves the determination of the electives not to the student but to the college; the choice will be subject to the approval of the Department of Education "only for the purpose of determining the availability of qualified teachers".

In Junior and Senior Years the committee likewise would require a total minimum of 60 units. Of these, 35 to 42 units should be allotted to a field of specialization or a major and the remainder to related subjects or cultural or professional subjects. The requirements are made no more specific than that.

The Sinco Report emphasizes the need for greater attention to general or liberal education in the colleges. At pre-

sent, collegiate studies are prematurely professionalized or vocationalized. For lack of sufficient liberal education, college graduates are "quite limited in the breadth and depth of their thinking and judgment and are not adequately prepared to act as intelligent leaders of the community and the country." What the nation needs are more highly educated graduates as distinguished from mere holders of degrees. There should be much greater emphasis than at present on the study of English in freshman and sophomore years because without proficiency in English the student cannot acquire sufficient understanding of the other subjects in the curriculum. But the committee cautions against teaching the general education courses merely as introductory to higher courses; they are not merely handmaids to specialization but have their own finality: the securing of high cultural quality in one's college education.

The teacher is the decisive factor in raising the standard of education. The Sinco Report insists on merit and competence alone as the criteria for the employment and promotion of teachers. In assessing the qualities of a prospective teacher it would attach much importance to the standing of the institution which trained him. Continued in-service training of teachers is urged. Teacher-training institutions should emphasize basic general education, reduce professional courses to the essentials, divest their curricula of "educational frills". Requirements for teaching degrees should be raised; competence in language, especially English, should be proven before the teaching degree is awarded.

Before an institution is granted university status, the Sinco committee would require much more convincing proof of its worthiness than is demanded at present. It believes that most of the universities in the Philippines today are not yet worthy of the name. Besides intensifying the present requirements for university status, it would demand that at least two-thirds of the faculty be full-time teachers or researchers in the same university and that the institution be organized as a nonprofit or nonstock establishment. And, unbelievable as it may seem, the Sinco committee would require that "the final examination questions given at the end of the college

or professional courses should be submitted to the Department of Education for approval and the students' papers and grades on these examinations submitted for checking and possible revision by the Department."

The Sinco Report becomes very detailed when it urges the need for "concentration on the main function of the school" and for "teaching the true meaning of education". It wishes to remove all distractions which would interfere with the teacher's main job of teaching. Notices should not be passed around when classes are in session. Extra-curricular activities should not be allowed to interrupt the class schedule. Each school should be limited in the number of extra-curricular activities permitted to it. Interscholastic athletic competition should be de-emphasized and interscholastic meets held only once every four years. Community development should not be made a function of the school but left to the government and to the community itself. The committee wants stress to be placed on the students' habits of orderliness, courtesy, neatness, punctuality, etc. It is against cheating. It would strictly enforce the practice of rising when the teacher enters the classroom. At this point one would almost expect to find the regulation that prayers be said before and after class.

For the implementation of its recommendations the Sinco Report suggests a number of committees to be appointed by the Department of Education. A committee of three members would prepare an inexpensive textbook-printing program. Another committee would work towards the revamp of teacher-training curricula and the selection of qualified teachers. A committee would determine the quantity and the quality of library and laboratory facilities needed for university status. The most important group would be the Curriculum Implementation Committee which would be appointed in the Department of Education "to assist in carrying out the letter of the Committee's recommendations." This Curriculum Implementation Committee would complete the work of the Sinco Committee and execute its plans. Here the Sinco Report strikes what many educators will consider an ominous note,

for it says: "Much as the Committee would wish to specify in great detail the curriculum content and instructional materials and techniques to insure accurate interpretation of the plan, it desists as the better part of wisdom in favor of a national curriculum implementation committee..." Thus, it seems, to a committee of the Department of Education would be left the task of specifying "in great detail" the curriculum content and the instructional materials and techniques to be used in the schools of the Philippines. One can but hope that this national Curriculum Implementation Committee will itself find it to be the "better part of wisdom" to desist from such regimentation of the nation's schools.

The Sinco Report would assign to the University of the Philippines an important role in the reform of the educational system. On the committee to reform teacher education would be "the best qualified in the teacher-training institutions of the Bureau of Public Schools, Bureau of Private Schools, Philippine Normal College, Philippine College of Arts and Trades, and the University of the Philippines". The committee to determine the quality and the quantity of library and laboratory facilities would consist of "competent scholars and scientists from the University of the Philippines and other institutions of high standing". U.P. curricula and course descriptions are presented as models. The committee repeatedly urges close cooperation between the Department of Education and the different units of the University of the Philippines and suggests that it is especially in the Curriculum Implementation Committee that this cooperation will be most effective in "providing the nation with the best possible education within the limitations of the country's resources". Finally, the Sinco Committee recommends that only those institutions should be granted university status which have a faculty "with graduate degrees from the University of the Philippines or other institutions of similar standing". It would be interesting to know if the writers of the Report really admit that there are other institutions "of similar standing".

Since its publication in April, 1961, the Sinco Report has been much discussed by educators and educational associa-

tions. It is fortunate that time for discussion has been allowed. This is in keeping with the Sinco committee's own recommendation that no curriculum changes be made without adequate preparation. It cites the sad example of the 1957 Revised Philippine Educational Program which was approved by the Board of National Education on May 15th and scheduled for implementation on June 15th of the same year.

Among the organizations which for the past several months have been seriously considering the recommendations of the Sinco committee is the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP). The various departments of the CEAP—Elementary Schools' Department, High School Departments, etc.—have studied the provisions pertinent to their respective levels and a "super-committee" has prepared a statement of the CEAP position which, after much discussion, has been adopted by the Board of Governors.

The CEAP has found much to commend in the Sinco Report. These commendable features are easily discernible among those summarized above. Adverse criticisms of the Report are due almost entirely to a fundamental mistake made by the Sinco Committee, viz., the failure to distinguish between private and public schools.

If the Sinco Committee had limited itself to the reform of the public school system, its observations and its recommendations would be more valid and generally acceptable. Logically it should have thus limited itself for it has taken the Swanson Report as its starting-point and has indicated no other basis for its recommendations. The Swanson Report was "A Survey of the Public Schools in the Philippines", made a few years ago by a group of American educators under the leadership of Professor J. Chester Swanson, aided by Filipino officials of the Bureau of Public Schools. Yet, using this report on the public schools as a basis, the Sinco Committee has prepared a plan to reform the whole educational system. As the CEAP statement points out, certain recommendations are premised on conditions peculiar to the public schools but, since they are made without qualification, they give the impression that they are intended also for private schools.

Failure to distinguish between public and private schools is probably the reason why the Sinco Report would assign a special role to the University of the Philippines in the implementation of its plans. The CEAP objects to the assignment of a favored position to the state university with respect to private schools. There is no legal basis for giving U.P. a kind of "ex-officio" membership on the various committees suggested by the Sinco Report, especially not on the Curriculum Implementation Committee which would specify "in great detail" the curriculum content and the instructional materials and techniques to be used in private schools. Nor, it must be admitted, has the University of the Philippines earned for itself the role of exemplar to private schools in the field of general education. Private colleges and universities would welcome the cooperation of the state university in the joint task of raising standards of education, but on a basis of equality.

Emphasizing the difference between public and private schools, the CEAP quotes its former Executive Secretary, the late Atty. Jesus Paredes, Jr.:

There is a distinction between the public and the private schools insofar as concerns the interest of the government. In public schools this interest is proprietary. The government not only supervises and regulates but controls the operation of the public school down to the last detail of internal administration, prescribing not only what is going to be taught in the classroom, but how, when, where, and by whom the teaching is to be done. On the other hand, the private school does not belong to the government. Government supervision of it, therefore, should not be allowed to develop to control. Our Constitution guarantees this.

There is a distinction between the public and the private school in the area of philosophy and objectives and on the level of administration. Their function in a democracy is distinct. The raison d'etre of private education is its right to set up its aims and its methods and be free to develop its program outside the rigid framework of a government bureau. As long as these objectives and methods do not run counter to or subvert public good, this freedom of development is the major contribution of a free private school system and it is a counterbalance of any control over education and the minds of citizens. Thus, in both the realm of educational development and in the political area of preventing thought control, private education is considered a postulate of enlightened democracy.

The CEAP statement agrees with the Sinco Committee that entrance to college should normally be preceded by eleven years of schooling. Thus, by implication, it is not in favor of the schedule now generally followed of only six years of elementary school plus four years of high school before collegiate studies. It agrees that the 6-3-2 plan suggested by the Report would be beneficial in a number of schools and has no objections to its implementation in the public schools and in those private schools which might prefer it. But a private school should be given a free choice between a 6-3-2 and a 7-4 plan; the 6-3-3 plan should not be *compulsory* on private schools.

A minority, but a significant minority, of private schools now have seven grades of elementary school and, of course, four of high school. Nearly all the students of these schools continue on to college. They are essentially college preparatory schools and thus in them there is no need for the bifurcation after third-year high school which the Sinco Report suggests. These schools should be permitted to continue with their 7-4 plan. The CEAP is aware that this would result in a lack of uniformity and would give rise to some difficulties in the case of transferring students. But uniformity among schools is not something to be sought after at any cost. The curricular freedom which the Sinco Committee wisely countenances in the colleges has its place also on the lower levels of education. Nor is the problem of transferrals insurmountable; the schools can make the necessary adjustments without harm to the students.

In his letter of transmittal of the Report to the Board of National Education, President Sinco gives his reasons for recommending six rather than seven years of elementary school. The reasons are financial. The national government cannot afford to support seven grades and thus it is preferable to add the extra year of schooling to the high school course for which the Constitution does not oblige the national government to lend financial support. (The Report doesn't tell us how this extra year is to be financed.) But this reasoning does not apply to the private schools which receive no support

from the government anyway. Therefore, why not permit the private schools to follow a 7-4 plan if they wish?

The CEAP elementary and secondary-school departments have taken occasion from their discussion of the Sinco Report to reformulate their objectives and to draw up curricula which they think preferable to those suggested by the Sinco Committee.

The Department of Elementary Schools agrees with the Sinco Committee that elementary school graduates should be functionally literate, i.e., they should be able to speak, read and write in a given language. But "functional literacy" is not the sole objective of elementary education. The elementary school curricula suggested by the CEAP aim "to produce a morally good person, to train him to think logically and develop habits of exactness, to express ideas correctly and coherently in speaking and writing".

In the proposed CEAP curricula, instruction in religion, Philippine history, civics, geography, health habits and the rudiments of the practical arts are integrated with the acquisition of the basic skills. In the very process of training in the language arts (in both the Pilipino and English languages) the child learns his "Social Sciences", his "Health and Science", and even acquires an acquaintance with some of the "Practical Arts". Thus, while the three R's are stressed, the other objectives of elementary school education are not neglected.

Aware of the sad circumstance that a great number of children finish their formal schooling upon their graduation from elementary school and even earlier, the CEAP recommends both a "terminal grade school" and a "non-terminal grade school". The terminal grade school curriculum is distinguished by its teaching of the vernacular in Grade I and II and by the course in "work education" running through the six years. These are not found in the non-terminal grade school; instead, there is greater stress on the learning of English as more useful for those children who are going on to high school. Whether a grade school should be terminal or non-terminal would be left to the option of the individual

institution; the choice would depend upon the nature of the school and of the clientele.

The High School Departments of the CEAP admit with the Sinco Committee that secondary education should aim at forming intelligent citizens. But "intelligent citizenship" is not the sole objective of the high school. The CEAP high schools' report has listed the specific objectives for the seven areas of learning: English and Pilipino, Fine and Practical Arts, Social Science, Physical Science, Mathematics, Character Education and Religion, Health and Physical Education. They are well worth the attention of all engaged in secondary education. For the sake of brevity they are summed up in the time-honored expressions: "the formation of a true human personality, the harmonious development of the whole man".

The CEAP proposes alternative curricula to those suggested by the Sinco Report for the Basic Secondary Course and for the Collegiate Secondary Course. In keeping with its support of the four-year secondary curriculum in those private schools which would prefer it, the CEAP also proposes a four-year course as a substitute for the one now being followed in the schools. Each of the three curricula stresses the "return to fundamentals" which the Sinco Committee urges but, unlike the Sinco curricula, the CEAP curricula offer scope to individual development through a system of electives. Private schools have consistently complained that the "minimum curricular requirements" laid down by the Department of Education are in practice almost the maximum offerings which a school can make. They leave very little space to the individual school for the pursuit of its peculiar objectives and for healthy experimentation with new curricula. Each of the CEAP curricula presently being proposed allows for six units of "electives" to be determined by the individual school. They are thus designed to do also on the secondary-school level what the Sinco Report provides for on the collegiate level, i.e., "to provide a flexible curriculum which will answer the need of institutions...for an opportunity to use their own initiative in developing distinctive educational offerings".

A comparatively small section of the Sinco Report is concerned with higher education. What it does say on this subject is generally acceptable to the CEAP. The CEAP would welcome the curricular freedom which the Sinco Report recommends and the renewed emphasis on liberal education with avoidance of premature specialization. It likewise endorses the many fine suggestions for the improvement of teacher qualifications—though it would not attribute quite so much importance to the reputation of the institution which granted the teacher his degree.

The CEAP statement disapproves of two of the new requirements suggested by the Sinco Report as conditions for the grant of university status. To require that at least two-thirds of the faculty be on a full-time basis the CEAP terms “unrealistic and impractical”. It says that this would be possible only in universities supported by the state or otherwise endowed by subsidies. But its strongest objection is to the recommendation that a university be required to submit its course-terminal examination questions to the Department of Education for its approval and likewise to submit the students’ answers and their examination grades for checking by the Department. The CEAP expresses its surprise that this suggestion could be made “by persons claiming to be in favor of freedom”. If the University of the Philippines should wish to concede these prerogatives to the Department of Education with regard to its own students, that is its concern. Since the State owns the University of the Philippines, perhaps it has the right to mark its examination papers. But private universities are another matter entirely. The reasons for the objection of the CEAP to this proposal are obvious.

In his inaugural address as President of the University of the Philippines, the Chairman of the Sinco Committee made some vigorous statements on what he considered to be the “sins of commission” in higher education in the Philippines.

These (sins of commission) consist largely in legislative and administrative acts and decisions that have cramped the style, to use an athletic phrase, of serious-minded and able educators of our country. I refer to the laws and regulations of the Government of the Philip-

pires that authorize administrative officials to prescribe the details of the curricula of all educational institutions, from primary schools to universities, the choice of teachers, and the subjects that should be included in the schedule of courses.

Standardization is desirable in factories and machines. It is detestable in institutions of higher learning. The University of the Philippines has for a long time been exempted from these limiting and cramping interferences. But, quite recently, laws have been passed requiring all institutions of learning, including the University of the Philippines, to include in their curricula certain specific subjects presumably intended to enrich the students' knowledge of a modern language and to instill in their minds our cultural heritage.

We do not doubt the good and noble intentions of the legislator and the executive official. But the life of an institution of higher learning has never been improved by dictation from without. Legislation has never improved the achievements of a university when it interferes with matters involving academic decisions.

The weaknesses in the suggestions of the Sinco Committee are due chiefly to neglect of the principles enunciated in these words of its Chairman. The most welcome features of the Report are due to compliance with these principles. It is suggested to the members of the Sinco Committee that they ponder these words of their Chairman so that a revision of the Sinco Report will recommend nothing that "cramps the style" of educators, nothing that gives any administrative official (or "Curriculum Implementation Committee") the right to prescribe the details of curricula, nothing that effects any "detestable" standardization, nothing that allows any undue interference with matters involving academic decisions.