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Some Notes on Public Elementary Education in Iloilo Province 1885-1899

FREDERICK W. FOX

One of the most interesting, though up to the present, obscure topics of late nineteenth century Philippine history is the public elementary school system. Everyone, of course, knows well enough that such an organization was legally founded by a *real decreto* issued at Madrid under date of December 20, 1863 by the authority of Queen Isabel II. Nobody questions the historicity of this document nor that of the three accompanying *reglamentos* which reduced to particulars the necessarily more generalized directives of the *decreto*.¹ Beyond this point, however, agreement seems largely to disappear; and views relative to the extent to which the provisions of this and subsequent legislation on the same subject actually emerged into concrete reality, diverge sharply.

The implementation of a law or an official governmental policy in cases of this kind must obviously be proved, not presumed. Too many of the so-called histories of education here and abroad appear to consist principally of plans, proposals, and school law citations. The Massachusetts educational prescription of 1642

is a notorious example of the egregious error into which one can fall by assuming that observance and execution automatically follow a law's enactment. The legislative emphasis in our histories of education tends to be basically unreal and sometimes grossly misleading. Indeed, it may be said that no account of education in any country can be critically satisfactory unless it devotes fully adequate attention to both the legislative formulae and to the facts of their execution.

The present cloud of confusion and uncertainty which surrounds the actual fulfillment record of the organic public education law of 1863 is due, this writer believes, to two chief causes, a serious insufficiency of authenticated data, and bias. Both causes are remediable. Our university professors and graduate students in the fields of social, cultural, and political history should be urged to set to work as soon as possible digging out the treasures of school data now hidden in our archives and libraries. This and all previously gathered material must then be subjected to critical examination and interpreted strictly in accordance with the canons of scientific historical method. Our biases of national pride, religion, and time must be laid aside and the facts accepted as they are demonstrated to be by tested evidence. The occupation of the Philippines by the United States in 1898 needs no longer to be justified by discrediting the Spanish administration. The American school system needs no longer vindicate its presence here by denying an actually operating and comparatively widespread system of public elementary schools in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Educational administrators need no longer attempt to enhance the value of modern school ways by contemning those of our grandparents.

The article here submitted offers what the author considers a modest contribution towards this new movement of objective historical inquiry. The data presented are the factual findings of a questionnaire-

interview survey conducted towards the end of 1952 under the direction of the Ateneo de Cagayan Graduate School. The study covered the public elementary instruction record of five towns in the Province of Iloilo, namely, Jaro, Janiuay, Pototan, Dingle, and Barotac Nuevo, over a period of eighteen years (1885-1899). A glance at the province map reveals that all these towns are located in a general direction north of the capital city within a radius of some forty-five kilometers. The selection of these particular towns was *random* in the sense that four simply happened to be the nearest neighboring centers of population to Pototan, the home of the survey interviewer, Mr. Lorente Palacios. No other towns in the province were investigated even with a preliminary check. Our intention was to ascertain by a direct spot-study of a sample community whether and to what degree the 1863 laws were executed.

The sources of the inquiry's specific findings were ten eye witnesses, old folks who claimed to have attended the public elementary schools of Iloilo at various periods between the years 1885 and 1899. From each town a man spoke for the boys' school and a woman for the girls' school. All the witnesses were urged not to make any statement of whose truth they were not sure. Every interview followed a set pattern of sixteen carefully chosen and worded questionnaire interrogations.

Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of our presently available data on the nineteenth century elementary instruction establishments renders comprehensive verification of our Iloilo witnesses' information almost impossible. Nevertheless a certain degree and spread of confirmation does appear in the substantial agreement among the individual witnesses and in the conformity of their testimony with certain recently uncovered national school data.

ILOILO PROVINCE, 1885-1899

Schools, although admittedly both a cause and an effect of the aims and efforts of the community or nation in which they operate, still are, the writer believes, far more the latter than the former. Schools do not, as a rule, produce economic well-being. On the contrary, they are produced by it. Cultural development follows economic development. Rarely, if ever, does it precede it.

During the last half of the nineteenth century Iloilo Province seems to have been one of the more thickly populated and economically active regions in the Philippines. As early as 1855 Iloilo city became one of the four legally designated national ports of entry; and by the last decade of the century she ranked second only to Manila in volume of both export and import trade. Her customs collections in 1894 amounted to ten times those of Cebu.² Sugar, as is to be expected, accounted for the great bulk of her out-going products; yet by no means all, for there were in 1900, according to the *Archipiélago Filipino*, some 30,000 looms in the province manufacturing *jusi* and cotton fabrics.³

Mrs. Campbell Dauncey, wife of the British consul in Iloilo city, draws this picture of the town as it looked to her at the close of the Spanish regime:

It is a big town with long straggling streets and the houses, all two stories high with gray corrugated iron roofs, stand apart, separated by little bits of garden with palms and flowering trees, which makes it quite pretty in spite of all the buildings being totally devoid of any architectural beauty.⁴

Communication facilities are further salient features of the area's cultural and economic environment in the light of which its educational institutions must be studied. A telephone network linking the provincial capital with Jaro, Molo, and Mandurriao, was inau-

gured in 1894. Direct cable service between Manila and Iloilo city began operations in 1897.⁵

Needless to say, this present brief report cannot discuss every phase of education covered by the survey. It will confine itself, therefore, to but three: school buildings, attendance, and the program of studies.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The school buildings of the late Spanish regime have been the subject of some fantastic assertions. One writer, for example, in the 1901 *Report of the Philippine Commission*, states that "There were no schoolhouses, no modern furniture, and until the Americans came, no good textbooks."⁶ In the same tenor, Fred Atkinson, the first American General Superintendent of Education, remarks: "The schools were held in the residences of the teachers or in buildings rented by the municipality and used by the principal as dwellings."⁷ One wonders what evidence can be brought forward to support such sweeping declarations. Neither of the two authors concerned offers any. Certainly the Iloilo survey provides none. Quite the contrary. Every one of the five towns studied possessed two school buildings which were neither mere private dwellings nor rented structures. All ten were, as a matter of fact, substantial buildings located as became their importance directly on the town plaza, either flanking the church or facing it from the opposite side of the square. The schools of Jaro, Janiway, and Pototan were constructed of stone, those of Dingle and Barotac Nuevo, of wood. All ten carried roofs of galvanized iron. The two buildings in Pototan were actually still being used as schools by the public educational system up to the outbreak of World War II. The Jaro boys' school building could accommodate three hundred.

As was common among elementary instruction establishments throughout the contemporary world even

in the United States and England, these Iloilo buildings comprised but one or two rooms for class purposes. Curtis describes a widely prevailing style of English elementary school structure in the post-1870 era in these terms: "The typical school of this period consisted of a large classroom with one or two smaller classrooms leading off from the main room."⁸ Isaac Kandell, an internationally recognized authority on comparative education, writing in 1930 of contemporary conditions in the United States, asserts that there were at that time (1930) in that country no fewer than 160,000 ungraded, one-teacher schools.⁹ Reflecting on these conditions prevalent in countries much more highly developed outside the Philippines, one can hardly but conclude that expressions of surprise or horror at finding one-room, one-teacher schools here in 1898 exhibit a highly unreal and false historical and sociological perspective.

Classroom furniture constitutes a second but exceedingly important aspect of the school housing problem. As with the principal structural material, so with classroom equipment the survey institutions divided themselves into two groups apparently on a basis of economic prosperity, location, and size. Jaro, Janiuay, and Pototan belonged to what seems to have been the more centrally situated, larger, and more wealthy unit. Their classrooms were furnished with blackboards, tables, chairs, benches, and desks. Every two children shared an inkwell. Paper and pencils were provided free. Dingle and Barotac Nuevo, on the other hand, occupying sites in the somewhat more isolated and less productive hilly coastal area, supplied their school rooms with very little. Their pupils were even requested to bring their own chairs.

AVERAGE REGULAR ATTENDANCE

Article 2 of the organic *Reglamento para las escuelas* (1863) required every Filipino child between the ages of seven and twelve to attend the local public

elementary school unless he was receiving at home or elsewhere equivalent instruction, or unless he lived too far away from it. The term "inconvenient" distance appears in practice to have meant residence beyond an hour's walk from the school site. Such an arrangement amounted to what may be called conditional compulsory education. Nobody pretends that it was fully satisfactory. It wasn't. It was a compromise imposed by the cold facts of the Philippine economy, very similar, as a matter of fact, to the very one imposed upon the post-Spanish educational authorities over the last fifty-three years. Most reasonable people agree that a half loaf is better than none whether the half is offered before or after 1900.

Our chief interest in the topic of attendance, however, does not lie in the deficient or non-deficient scope of the law, but in the number and proportion of school-age children who actually presented themselves regularly for instruction and were provided for by public funds in publicly controlled institutions. The reader should carefully note that since private school attendance is not included, the picture here sketched of elementary instructional spread in Iloilo is not complete. Private school student lists might approach in size or even equal those of the governmental institutions. Jaro is an example of just this situation.¹⁰

An official Church census taken in 1885 shows the total population of the five survey towns to have been 79,924.¹¹ The school-age group (7-12) counted 9,837. Table 1 indicates how these totals were distributed among the five municipalities individually.

According to the testimony of our respondents for Jaro, an average of 300 boys and 250 girls regularly came to class at the public elementary schools of that town during the period, 1896-1899. In Janiuay, the largest of the survey municipalities, the mean number of boys in steady attendance fluctuated between 100

TABLE 1
TOTAL AND SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION OF
THE FIVE SURVEY TOWNS, 1885

Municipality	Total Population	School-age (7-12) Population
Jaro	12,848	2,334
Janiuay	29,225	2,759
Pototan	16,063	1,565
Dingle	9,355	1,154
Barotac Nuevo	12,433	2,025
	79,924	9,837

and 150. The average regular girls' attendance ranged from 60 to 80.

Over the longer year-span running from 1885 to the ratification of the Treaty of Paris, Pototan counted 150 boys and from 100 to 150 girls regularly presenting themselves for class. Dingle and Barotac Nuevo, on the other hand, as in other aspects of the public education enterprise, achieved a less satisfactory record. Between 1892 and 1898 their boys' schools numbered only from 80 to 100 steady attenders and their girls' schools only from 50 to 70.

Table 2 casts the above cited figures into somewhat more manageable and significant form. For the sake of convenience, the estimates which were expressed by the witnesses in terms of a range have been inserted as a simple arithmetical mean.

TABLE 2
AVERAGE REGULAR ATTENDANCE IN THE PUBLIC
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF THE
SURVEY TOWNS, 1885-1899

Municipality	Date	Average Regular Attendance		
		Boys	Girls	Total
Jaro	1896-1899	300	225	525
Janiuay	1892-1898	125	70	195
Pototan	1885-1898	150	125	275
Dingle	1892-1898	90	60	150
Barotac Nuevo	1892-1898	90	60	150
		755	540	1,295

One may be puzzled how these statistics are to be interpreted. Are they large or small? Do they manifest cultural vigor or stagnation? The reply, obviously, is not simple, but must be framed in the light of many complex factors such as geographical location, type and level of the national economy, and contemporary achievement of other peoples along the same line.

Suppose we consider the survey group as a whole. The total school-age population of the five towns in 1885 was 9,837. If this figure is used as a base with which to compare the total attendance numbers as indicated in Table 2, we discover, in a very rough sort of way, that about 13 of every 100 school-age children in the area were actually regular pupils in the ten public elementary schools. Compare this record with that of two other regions elsewhere in the world a few years earlier.

Edgar Knight, the well known American school historian, estimates that in North Carolina in 1884 the percentage of the school-age population in actual attendance at the public elementary institutions was 34.¹² The reader should observe, however, that the superiority in attendance-spread thus indicated over that of Iloilo may be more apparent than real, for the North Carolina academic year at that time lasted only 11 weeks. The Iloilo school year, according to our respondents, ran approximately 40 weeks, or almost 4 times as long. On still another basis, perhaps a comparison may be proposed between the public elementary schools of the Iloilo group and those of the Central Provinces of India, a British colony. An official governmental investigation of education conducted there in 1882 disclosed that approximately 1 person in every 170 of the total population was at least registered in the wholly publicly financed institutions of elementary instruction.¹³ The Iloilo ratio as shown in Tables 1 and 2 is three times greater, 1 in every 56.

An additional point of moment appearing in Table 2 is the boy-girl ratio in the survey schools. In terms

of percentage there were 58 boys to every 42 girls. That this proportion deviated greatly from the contemporary European ratio may be seriously doubted. Over in the Central Provinces of India in 1882, of course, the boys were favored to the extent of 23 to 1. As for the Philippine practice of separating the boys' school from that of the girls', that is simply to be regarded as an imitation of a common custom in the elementary schools of Europe in the nineteenth century.

PROGRAM OF STUDIES

Article 1 of the *Reglamento para las escuelas* (1863) directed that the program of studies in the public elementary institutions of the Philippines should include instruction in *ten* subject areas or skills. Those specified were: Christian Doctrine, reading, writing, Spanish, arithmetic, geography, history, agriculture, courtesy, and singing. For the girls' curriculum, the law substituted sewing and domestic science for geography, history, and agriculture.

This could be called an imposing catalogue. Unhappily, much doubt prevails that the program as listed was ever really implemented to any substantial degree. Indeed, some writers have gone so far as to declare that the Philippine public elementary education establishments of the nineteenth century were hardly more than catechetical centers where religious instruction and training occupied almost exclusively the time and energy of the children.

The Iloilo program as described by our respondents does not bear out these doubts. On the contrary, it manifests a rather close adherence to the 1863 organic curricular provisions. The witnesses who spoke for the five boys' schools testified that some eight subjects or skills were taught daily or on alternate days. These were: Christian Doctrine, reading, writing, arithmetic, history, geography, drawing, and Spanish. In the girls' establishments, instruction was given in Christian

Doctrine, reading, writing, Spanish, drawing, singing, sewing, and courtesy. Sewing is obviously a vocational skill.

The prominence of religion in the Iloilo program was due to two causes: intrinsic value and current custom. As Kandel correctly observes, religious instruction constituted an integral element in the elementary curricula of a number of the great West European Powers of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The Philippines is a daughter of West Europe. But even apart from being favored by contemporary practice, religion possesses in itself transcendent worth. Religion is a systematic study of man's relations to God Who is the central fact of history, the maker and maintainer of the universe, the author of all life. Upon a man's moral knowledge and behavior depend not only his own personal supernatural success, but also the cultural and economic progress of his country. A recent personnel study of seventy-six United States business corporations discloses that 90 per cent of their employee occupational failures were due, not to deficiencies in vocational knowledge and skill, but to personal moral and character defects.¹⁵ Moral and character training without a religious foundation and support is ineffective and shortlived.

No open and reasonable mind would conclude that adequate attention to religion in a school program precludes equally adequate instruction and training in other areas of human activity. Catholic school children daily compete successfully for the world's jobs. Our respondents in Iloilo inform us that religion was taught about 30 minutes every morning and about 15 minutes each afternoon. Forty-five minutes in a child's class day of six hours hardly seems disproportionate.

Joseph R. Hayden in his work, *The Philippines*, describes the above sketched public elementary curriculum of Spanish times as "archaic" and "medieval".¹⁶ The insinuation seems to be that the average grade

school program of studies in the rest of the contemporary world was substantially broader and far more "up-to-date". If so, the learned gentleman is to be suspected of serious ignorance of conditions prevalent in late nineteenth century popular elementary education. In 1898, for example, in Dr. Hayden's own country, the United States, roughly *one-half* of all elementary school children were in *rural* schools, where, as W. T. Harris, one-time U. S. Commissioner of Education, remarks: "... the rank and file of the children learned a little reading, writing, and arithmetic..."¹⁷ Of English elementary instruction in 1890, Sharpless writes: "The actual curriculum taken by the great body of scholars is quite meager, embracing besides the three standard subjects, little more than English, geography or history, singing... and drawing [for boys] or needlework [for girls]."¹⁸ Kandel corroborates Sharpless. The aim of the elementary schools of England prior to 1903, he states, "... was to impart the essentials of education, the three 'Rs' mainly, and religious instruction."¹⁹

Mere course titles, naturally, cannot be accepted as a reliable index of a school program's quality. Their time allotments must also be known. As noted previously, the Iloilo class day lasted 6 hours, 4 in the morning from 7 to 11 o'clock, and 2 in the afternoon, from 2 to 4 o'clock. Although only Sunday appears to have been listed in the organic legislation as the regular weekly holiday, the Iloilo schools commonly made Thursday an additional weekly vacation day. The academic year usually commenced in June and closed in March, thus providing some 40 weeks of class.

Of equal moment with daily, weekly, and yearly time schedules in appraising a school program is its total length in terms of years. The fundamental law of 1863 prescribed no definite number. The principle of individual differences and the well known world-wide phenomenon of attendance irregularity in rural

areas rendered such specification impracticable. Consequently, the time a Filipino child took to master the required principles, information, and skills, depended on his own talent, efforts, and steadiness of attendance. In point of fact, the Iloilo program appears to have comprised three fairly well defined grades or levels. Pupils were tested monthly, quarterly, and annually. At the close of the third and highest grade, in addition to the usual written tests, there was held for the graduation candidates a public oral examination in the presence of the parents, friends, civic officials, and other notables. If anyone feels that this three-year program was inadequate for a rural archipelago in the late nineteenth century, he should be aware that in 1895 the average American citizen in the South Central states had but 2.65 years of education in terms of 40 weeks of annual class.²⁰

A final but scarcely less significant aspect of the survey schools' curriculum upon which this report plans to touch is the language used for instruction. Everyone, of course, is aware that the organic law required Spanish as the official medium of communication in the public elementary system. Article 3 of the *Reglamento para las escuelas* reads: "Teachers shall take special care that the pupils practice the use of Spanish. Class instruction is to be given in this tongue according to the measure in which the children understand it. During class time students are forbidden to use their regional language."

It is perhaps apropos to observe here that the compulsory employment of Spanish in the schools was approved with but one dissent by the Commission for the Reorganization of Studies, a body of Philippine educators, civic, and cultural leaders, appointed in 1855 by Governor General Crespo.²¹

The Iloilo schools seem to have followed this language regulation with rather remarkable fidelity. Our witnesses testified that the four establishments of Janiuay and Pototan exacted the use of Spanish from

all even the youngest pupils. The other six appear to have taken advantage of the gradation of use permitted by the law. Some mixture of the regional tongue was allowed the beginners, although the upper grade children were held to the strict Spanish medium both in the classroom and on the school grounds.

RECAPITULATION

In brief, the salient findings of our modest questionnaire-interview study of public elementary education in five towns of late nineteenth century Iloilo are these: 1. Each of the five municipalities without exception possessed two substantial school buildings which were neither private residences nor mere rented structures. 2. The *regular attendance* in these ten public elementary instruction establishments amounted roughly to 13 per cent of the area's school-age population. Regularity of actual attendance, it must be emphasized, not mere enrollment lists, is the acid test of a region's instructional spread. In this connection, it should also be borne in mind that children attending private elementary institutions have not been included in our counts. In Jaro, at least, the number of these latter almost equalled that in the governmental schools. 3. The normal class day lasted 6 hours. The annual term, running usually from June to March comprised approximately 40 five-day weeks. Teaching and recitation were habitually carried on in Spanish although in 3 of the 5 towns a certain amount of the regional tongue was permitted beginners. The curriculum provided instruction and training in seven or eight subject matter areas or skills, the customary ones of the contemporary school world.

These findings, although directly pertaining to only one comparatively small district, and although in some respects unauthenticated, nevertheless represent substantial conformity among the five towns themselves and remarkable agreement with recently uncovered

national school data of the same era. In the opinion of the writer they merit serious consideration. Indeed, it could be said with sound reason that the sample evidence here brought forward is cogent enough, and the general trend of the disclosures striking enough, to demand a thorough restudy and reappraisal of the whole subject of Philippine nineteenth century public elementary education.

¹ "Instrucción pública", *Diccionario de la Administración de Filipinas*, Vol. III. Daniel Grifol y Aliaga's school law compilation, the *Instrucción primaria en Filipinas* (Manila, 1894), also contains texts of the four documents.

² José Algué (ed.), *Archipiélago Filipino* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), I, 304 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 103 ff.

⁴ Campbell Dauncey (Mrs.), *Englishwoman in the Philippines* (London, 1906), p. 17.

⁵ Algué, *Op. cit.*, I, 332.

⁶ *Report of the Philippine Commission: 1901*, Sen. doc. 112, 56th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 105.

⁷ Fred W. Atkinson, *Philippine Islands* (Boston, 1906), p. 373 ff.

⁸ S. J. Curtis, *History of Education in Great Britain* (London, 1948), p. 174.

⁹ Isaac Kandel, *Comparative Education* (Boston, 1933), p. 489.

¹⁰ The *Guía oficial de Filipinas: 1891* (Manila, 1892) reports (p. 84) 126 boy day-scholars in the elementary school of the Colegio-Seminario of Jaro. The same official annual directory of the following year (1892) reports (p. 552) 280 girls in the Colegio de San José de Jaro. The sum is 406. Besides these two there may have been other non-public establishments.

¹¹ *Estado general de los pueblos del Arzobispo de Manila y los Obispos sufragáneos*, 1885 (Manila, 1886), p. 51 ff.

¹² Edgar Knight, *The Public School in North Carolina* (New York, 1916), p. 314.

¹³ India. Education Commission. *Report on Education in the Central Provinces from the Annexation of the Sagar and Narbada Territories to the Close of 1881-1882* (Nagpur, India, 1882), p. 25.

¹⁴ Kandel, *Op. cit.*, p. 349.

¹⁵ Paul Boynton, *So You Want a Better Job* (New York, 1947), pp. 1-24.

¹⁶ Joseph R. Hayden, *The Philippines. A Study in National Development* (New York, 1942), p. 465.

¹⁷ William T. Harris, "Elementary Education," *Education in the United States*, ed. by Nicholas Murray Butler (New York, 1910), p. 85.

¹⁸ Isaac Sharpless, *English Education* (New York, 1897), p. 33.

¹⁹ Kandel, *Op. cit.*, p. 361.

²⁰ Harris, *Op. cit.*, p. 139. Appendix IX.

²¹ José Montero y Vidal, *Historia general de Filipinas* (Madrid, 1895), III, 314, n. 2.