

EDUCATING THE FILIPINO YOUTH FOR NATION-BUILDING

*Dr. Vicente A. Quiton**

National development is not only the concern of adults but also of the youths for in long run it will be the young people of today who will either enjoy the blessings of national progress and prosperity or suffer the curse of underdevelopment and poverty. It is therefore fitting and proper that every Filipino youth be so educated as to understand his roles and assume his responsibilities in nation-building.

Before delving lengthily on this topic, let me explain briefly the major components of national development, namely: (1) manpower development and utilization, (2) resource development and conservation, (3) socio-cultural development and political maturation, and (4) moral development and value formation. Manpower development has to do with education or training the labor force to become economically productive and responsible citizens. This is closely linked to the development and conservation of natural resources such as land, water, forests, wildlife, and mineral resources. Socio-cultural development aims to strengthen the existing social institutions, establish essential organizations, and evolve a stable and mature political system which gives more weight on the welfare of the majority than the vested interests of a privileged few. Moral development endeavors to instill the right moral and spiritual values that are essential to just and harmonious democratic society. In consonance with these development concerns, how can the Filipino youths of today be educated so that they can contribute their share to national development?

Manpower Development and Utilization

The strength of a nation lies not just on the abundance of its natural resources but more so on the quality and capability of its people. The Filipino youths must be given opportunities for education and training so

** Dr. Vicente A. Quiton is the Vice President for Academic Affairs of the Visayas State College of Agriculture. He holds a doctorate in Agricultural Education from the University of Illinois, U.S.A.*

that they can adequately prepare themselves to enter adult society and the world of work. It is therefore essential that young people take advantage of the educational and training opportunities that are provided to them so that they can develop their potentials and sharpen their professional and vocational competencies. Failing to avail of these educational and vocational training opportunities, many out-of-school youths join the ranks of the unemployed, the impoverished and juvenile delinquents. The youths of today are more fortunate than before because the government and some private firms offer them scholarship especially to the poor but deserving ones, thus increasing their access to formal education. It is a sad fact that most young people today are merely seeking for employment in the government after graduation. It is high time that we assist them in exploring employment opportunities in the private sector and in entrepreneurship so that we can generate more employment opportunities for them. Instead of waiting for white-collar jobs, young people should explore possibilities for productive self-employment by seeking vocational training opportunities not only in the universities and colleges but also through non-formal education which requires less time and cost. However, this is easier said than done, for self-employment requires capital and the basic rudiments of business management which necessitates assistance from the government and non-government organizations.

There is a need to explore ways and means to harness the idle labor force of out-of-school youths and school leavers for productive economic activities. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in cooperation with state colleges and universities has been actively offering livelihood training programs for these youths, but it seems that only a small segment of the out-of-school youth population is responding positively. Considering the rising cost of labor, young people should help their parents in farm and household chores, thus reducing production and household expenses. Furthermore, this will provide hands-on experience that will make them more effective entrepreneurs in the future and develop a desirable attitude toward manual work. Manpower development also involves promotion of physical fitness through health education and sports. Moreover, the youngsters should participate actively in such programs not only to promote physical well-being but also to develop sportsmanship and provide opportunities for the wholesome use of leisure time.

Natural Resource Development and Conservation

The natural resources of the country provide the setting and the raw materials for economic activities. Despite a strong manpower training program, socio-economic development cannot proceed if the natural resources are scarce or are already depleted by abuse and improper utilization. Our youths must learn to appreciate the value of our national resources and the importance of ecological protection and conservation. Environmental awareness must be integrated into the curriculum even as early as the grade school. Instead of the traditional rote-memory type of learning, students should be actively involved in the analysis of problems and issues relevant to environmental degradation and how they can contribute to the solution of these problems. They should be allowed to observe actual cases of environmental abuse and degradation so that they will experience the stark realities and dangers of ecological imbalance. By participating in tree-planting and environmental protection activities, students can develop the right habits that will reduce environmental pollution. Energy-conservation measures should be taught experientially in the home and in the school so that they become an integral part of the behavior patterns of the youngsters even at an early age.

Considering the vigilance of the youths, they can be harnessed effectively to monitor and report abusive government officials and private citizens who are engaged in activities detrimental to our natural resources and ecological balance. Mass media can be used effectively by the youths to create environmental awareness and to publicly expose abuses on our natural resources.

Socio-Cultural Development and Political Maturation

For our country to prosper, there is a need to develop not only our physical infrastructures but also our social system, and political institutions that provide the necessary social arrangements and political climate conducive to concerted action. Historically, Filipinos are used to solving their problems individually rather than collectively; however, such individualistic approach to development is no longer suitable under our modern interdependent society in which the problem of one has become the problem of all.

Group consciousness and cooperation must be instilled in the youths so that they will learn early in life how to work cooperatively in preparation for their leadership and collective responsibilities in society. In school they must

learn the rudiments of democracy and strive to develop participatory and organizational skills that are essential to concerted problem solving.

Our young people must be actively involved in strengthening the major social institutions of which they are part such as the home, the school, the church and the economic system. The home is the basic unit of the Philippine society and as such, the strength and the unity of the family will determine, to a large degree, the strength and solidarity of the nation as a whole. Through the guidance and example of their parents, they develop the habits, skills and values that are essential to just and harmonious social relationships such as democracy, respect for human dignity, open-mindedness, honesty and cooperation.

Through their participation in student organizations and campus politics, the youths should strive to develop the leadership skills and behavior patterns that are socially and morally acceptable so that they can contribute their share to political maturation wherein public officials are selected on the basis of merit rather than money. The school, on the other hand, should encourage healthy debate and discussion of current economic, political and social issues by students and consult them matters affecting their welfare. If the youths are expected to participate actively in nation building, their voice must be heard by the adult society. After all, they are the ultimate beneficiaries of development efforts. They must endeavor to conserve our desirable Filipino cultural traits and traditions by instilling in them the appreciation of our own cultural heritage and combatting the cultural influx of undesirable influences such as perverted sex and violence in entertainment and mass media.

Moral Development and Value Formation

Economic development that is devoid of morality and responsible stewardship can be a curse than a blessing to society. Greed for material wealth and political power without due regard for human dignity and social justice has been a source of oppression in our country, thus resulting in continuing suffering and increasing disparity between the rich and the poor.

Moral development and value formation must start at an early age. The Holy Bible, in Proverbs 22:6 reminds us to "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will turn from it". Values are caught rather than taught through morality and right example of adults especially parents, teachers, and public officials.

The greatest crisis that our country is facing is not economic but moral crisis which is gradually weakening the ethical core that binds our society together. We can help avert this crisis by instilling the right values in our young people through instruction and example. What the youths want is a morality that is not just theoretical but functional, for they learn best from what they see and imitate than from what they hear.

The role of the youths in nation building cannot be isolated from the roles that adults have to play in the development process. Adults must take the lead and set the good example in moral regeneration. They must consult the youths on matters affecting their future, involve them in solving their own problems, counsel them when things go wrong, and above all, show them the right way not through "lip service" but through life example.

Like the family, the church has a very important role to play in moral revival because of the strong spiritual motivation behind moral behavior. The church must go beyond the realm of the liturgical to the practical if young people are to respond positively to religious programs especially those that have direct relevance to real-life problems. The youths of today are seeking direction and meaning to life, but these are best understood through practical demonstration rather than pure doctrine. For this is the word of Jesus Christ himself: "If you have done these to the least of these my brethren, you have done these unto me".

As we face the challenges of the 21st century and the next millenium, the school should also be concerned with the development of global values that are essential to our participation in the international community.

Conclusion

Indeed, nation-building though difficult and complicated, is everybody's concern. Every Filipino student, parent, teacher and public official must always remember that what we do with ourselves and our country today will certainly affect the quality of our life tomorrow. We have only two choices: either to take the backseat of indifference and dash the fragile ship of our national destiny against the ugly rocks of lethargy and underdevelopment; or to grab with commitment the steering wheel of responsibility and take an active, innovative role in guiding the future of our youths and our country to new heights of prosperity and freedom.

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