

The College as Environment *

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The concept of the college as environment is not spanking new. It is implied in many, and explicitly stated in a few, of the sociological discussions of the college as a community. However, the concept has been nowhere near being systematically developed as a tool for reviewing the nature and processes of education, and assessing the relevance of educational institutions in modern societies.

I propose in my brief remarks to suggest some alternative ways of viewing education and educational institutions, and to indicate that the

concept of the college as environment is singularly appropriate towards the attainment of constructive change and increased relevance in educational institutions.

Let me begin with the orthodox view of education. This view of education emphasizes its pedagogical dimension. A *formal* teacher-learner situation or relationship is the *sine qua non*. You cannot have education without this teacher-learner situation, this situation must be a formal or structured situation, and education is the product of the teacher

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teaching, and the learner learning. Schools and colleges are built around those propositions; they are engineered to deliberately produce this product. So the product is first defined and designed as a curriculum of subjects to be taught and learned; a faculty is organized to do the teaching; students are admitted to do the learning, in a physical plant to house or shelter the teaching-learning process, with the necessary administrative and financial arrangements.

I will exaggerate somewhat and say that it is possible, in this concept of education, to view the school or college as analogous to an academic factory or teaching machine that is engineered consistently to produce the pre-designed output of educational packages.

Perhaps this way of putting it is satisfactory to some of us. If you had a technically good curriculum of subjects, if you had a competent faculty and student body, with adequate support facilities and management, you would have an efficient academic factory churning out or producing quality educational packages. Some of us, of course, will be unhappy and scandalized by the analogy, but it is not too far-fetched.

There is a product design, a production layout, costing, and operations. The school or college as an efficient teaching machine is a logical culmination of the view of education as an output of a formal, structured teacher-learner situation. And some of us may be satisfied with this as long as the output of educational packages is of uniformly good quality. But others might not, because stress on the pedagogical dimensions of education is too narrow and confining a view, which leads away from the rich aspects of the school or college as a social institution as a significant personal experience.

NON-PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

I will now briefly refer to some of these non-pedagogical aspects of educational institution. Schools, colleges, and universities are social institutions. They discharge, therefore, as we expect them to, a particular social function. This function is that of providing education. In addition to this, however, educational institutions perform a number of additional social functions or roles which have little or nothing to do with the formal teaching and learning for which they were designed.

Some of these non-educational functions of educational institutions are socially vital and crucial. For instance, this year there are about 12.4 million young Filipinos in the formal school system (more than 7.8 million in elementary schools, more than 3.6 million in high schools, and another million in colleges and universities.) The 4.6 million in the second and third levels have all undergone elementary schooling. In other words, thanks to the school system, about 12.4 million young Filipinos, most of them in their growing-up years, are *sharing a common experience*, the schooling experience.

To the extent that all, or almost all, of our young countrymen share a common experience, where the sharing lasts for at least four to six years of their lives, to this extent the schools are a powerful instrument for consolidating the national culture and the national society. A society whose members do not share something in common cannot be a community, for the essence of community is a sharing of things in common. Nor can a national culture survive without shared experiences to give meaning to the common life. If the schools did not perform this function of consolidating the national society we would have to

invent an alternative institution to hold the society together into a community, but there is no institution today in Philippine society that can provide our young people with an experience that is as directly and personally shared as the schooling experience provided by the educational institutions.

To the extent, furthermore, that the experience provided by the schools is homogeneous in quality from region to region, urban and rural, and from class to social class, rich and poor, to the extent the schools also exert an egalitarian and democratic influence on the people and their society.

The consolidating and democratizing functions of schools have profound significance for the stability of society and the quality of human life. But as I have said, they fall outside the view of education as a product of the formal teacher-learner situation that is the basic design of our school system. They are non-pedagogical roles of the educational institutions.

The schools have another important role. They are a key instrument of the national society for the allocation of roles and statuses amongst its members. In our country

where schooling, especially a college diploma, is attributed high school value, having gone to school and not having gone to school are important criteria for determining the range of social roles and statuses available to individuals. If you do not have a high school certificate you are *ipso facto* ineligible for a wide category of jobs, and you are employable only for those jobs which society has not reserved for high school graduates. By 1974-1975, according to Presidential Decree No. 46, a person cannot attain the social status of a college student without passing the college admission test; he is therefore disqualified from all those professions and occupations requiring college education. Neither can he take any of the civil service examinations that would qualify him for employment in a range of career government positions. In other words, educational institutions allocate or distribute social roles and statuses by dividing the members of society into those who are qualified for some roles/statuses, and those who are not.

The same screening or allocating function is performed as between amongst schools. Certainly the graduate of Silliman University is accorded a social status different from

that accorded to the graduate of, let's say, a less prestigious, university somewhere in Luzon. In the same way, the student of the high school department of Ateneo de Manila is assigned a status in society different from that assigned to the student in a barrio high school. What might interest you is that in these cases the distribution of social roles and statuses has no relevance to the quality of the school curriculum, to the excellence of the school faculty, or to the actual learning acquired by the student or graduate. The social status we assign to the Ateneo student depends wholly and entirely on the fact that he is an Atenista—whether he is a good or lazy student, whether he benefited from the Ateneo curriculum or not at all, whether he is at the top or bottom of his class, he is assigned a status in society which will last as long as he lives, influencing the circle of his girl friends, the peers he associates with, the jobs open to him, his salary or income, and his way of life. And here again the pedagogical aspects of education are completely irrelevant.

There is one more point to raise about the non-conventional roles of the college. This is, that there is a tremendous amount of action, a

world of happenings, an entire life and experience taking place within the college, but outside of the curriculum or pedagogical design. Colleges are the vehicle of social expectations, the venue of personal experiences, and oftentimes other social institutions pass the buck of responsibility to them. For instance, one researcher reports, colleges in the Philippines are in one sense *de luxe* babysitters, for young people whose parents do not quite know what to do with them until they get married. For many adolescents and young adults also, the rish, bursting, magnificent, tender, powerful, and tingling love they discover on campus might be the high point of their college stay. Other students perceive the curriculum as a support or deterrent in their pursuit of driving ambitions, some are beaten by the frustrating collapse of ideals or resolutely overcome every challenge to the intellect and to the spirit and many are liberated from the taboos and superstitions of a rural home by exposure to exhilarating and risky unorthodoxies on campus.

Enough has been said about the non-formal functions which schools and colleges discharge in society, and about the diverse experiences that take place in the lives of young

people who steadily grow and develop during the years they spend on campus. We cannot now divest the colleges of these functions, nor outlaw and banish these experiences from the campus. Whether we approve or disapprove of them, they have become part of our educational institutions.

I hope that I do not irritate you by saying again that these non-formal functions and human experiences are not embraced within the concept of education as a formal pedagogical system, as a structured teacher-learner situation. In seeming to belabor this point I do not at all intend to knock or criticize the orthodox view. The teacher-learner system is essential to every educational institution, at least for the transmission of the traditional national culture which is essential to social stability in an increasingly complex and technological changing world.

The point I wish to convey is that the concept of the college as environment is a convenient as well as strategic concept which is appropriate to the assessment of the efficiency of the college not only as a formal pedagogical and curricular system, but also to the evaluation of

the efficiency of the college as a social institution and as a community of developing and maturing youth. The concept around which Dr. Macario Ruiz organized his research can be developed and expanded for use in colleges whose leaders desire to improve their formal teaching and learning systems, as well as to increase their relevance to the human beings and communities they serve. Because of its promise and potential, the discussion of the concept of college as environment gives me both pleasure and honor to be part of this conference.

SUGGESTIONS

I have two suggestions to make in connection with the concept, and especially with its application. First, assessment or evaluation of any particular college environment, whether through Dr. Ruiz' SEAS scales or some other appropriate instrument, will become more meaningful if undertaken in relation to that college's broad purposes and specific program objectives. I am sure you will understand that whatever we succeed in identifying or establishing as characteristics of the college as environment, will become much more meaningful if related to what the college

resolves to attain as institutional purposes through its program objectives. We might, for instance, establish a conspicuous characteristics of the environment of a particular college of agriculture, norms of achievement and aspirations tending graduates to become distinguished contributors to international research journals. We would be tempted to adjudge this college as successful because of the international reputation of its faculty and student as scientists. But if the college has for its primary purposes and objectives the raising of the productivity of the neighboring rice and vegetable farms by five percent every year for five years, but neglected to have any extension services, then that college is a failure, because its distinguished contributions to international journals will not raise the income of the poor farmers around the college.

Secondly, I suggest that the assessment of the college as environment especially as an approach to institutional self-analysis, should be supported by a background study of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the "service area" of the college. This service area would normally correspond to the

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region from which the college normally gets most of its students and to the community of people whose quality of life the college seeks to affect. This is an added chore and task in institutional self-analysis, but the information from this background study is essential to the meaningful interpretation of the characteristics of the college as environment.

It is deeply encouraging to know of the growing interest in institutional self-analysis, because it is only in this way that our educational institutions can know themselves, improve themselves, and prepare for the changes ahead, toward a better quality of life for our people.