

HUMAN RIGHTS AND MORAL EDUCATION¹

Geronima T. Pecson⁽²⁾

I am very grateful for you remembering me to join you to participate in your meeting, for the Associated Schools idea was started at a time when I was elected to the International Executive Board of UNESCO. The programs were under my care when I became chairman of the Commission on the program of the International Board. I feel that I was the midwife for the Associated Schools idea and, therefore, now that you are making the evaluation of your performance, I am happy for you are one, or perhaps, two or three groups all over the world who have continued with the project long before the major project was already finished. The question or the subject of international understanding should continuously be plugged for until it becomes part and parcel or second nature to every individual. I am happy, too, to see quite a number of you with whom I have worked on these programs. This meeting then becomes a kind of reunion for all of us. I am particularly thankful that I have a chance now to make acknowledgement of the work that you have done so ably for which I am very proud to speak at UNESCO.

That I am deeply pleased to be with you goes without saying. But having said anyway, let me hasten to say that the topic you have seen fit to assign to me is one that requires no ordinary amount of reflection and soul-searching. It is important that we all become fully aware of its implications in our work. This is doubly significant considering that 1968 has been designated as International Human Rights Year to commemorate the adop-

(1) Paper read by Hon. Pecson at the Third National Seminar-Workshop on Education for International Understanding, Iloilo City, February 12-17, 1968. Printed with permission.

(2) Former Senator Pecson has for many years been Chairman, UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines.

tion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

It was the eminent Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Rene Maheu, who said that "the essential element of Unesco's vocation and action is not technical but ethical." This statement was made during the 41st Session of the Economic and Social Council held at Geneva on July 7, 1966. Mr. Maheu asserted that Unesco's objectives are not the advancement of education, science and culture." However, eminent the intrinsic warranty for fostering them, he stressed, they are no more than avenues and media—the means towards the ethical end which, according to him, "must be reflected in every aspect of its technical action as an inward and technical parameter and inspiration discernible beyond the practical content." He went on to say that the underlying justifications for intellectual cooperation are "the awareness it promotes of the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind and its gradual organization into a force against which the instincts of antagonism and violence cannot ultimately prevail." The true rationale of operational aid to development, he emphasized, is the correction of injustice even more than the relief of hardship.

The same idea is reflected in an editorial in the *Unesco Philippines* in its last issue in 1966, a portion of which I would like to quote:

The ethical dimension of Unesco's ends, as expressed by Director-General Maheu, is worthy of note and should serve as a gentle reminder that, in the final analysis, the usefulness of Unesco's work is in terms not only of the measurable progress in life but also in terms of moral and spiritual values the assessment of which defy definition. They can only be made manifest in the quality of life and relationships of men. More food, better clothing, stronger shelter—these mankind needs in increasing abundance. But even these should serve as means, not ends in themselves.

I have taken time to read portions of your excellent publication, *Graded Curriculum of International Understanding*, to see if the ethical dimension of Unesco's work is given proper expression. I am deeply pleased to note that those of you who were at the Baguio seminar-workshop manifested evident awareness of this. Your chart of graded concepts, the curriculum guides based on said concepts, the proposed programmes of action—all give cognizance of the moral and spiritual values which should be integrated in your work. I would like to be able to express faith that you have been and continue to be as good in implementation as you are in planning.

May I draw your attention on a few more points of concern regarding human rights and moral education.

First of all, we all agree that every man has rights—some inherent, others conferred. But more often than not, these rights are not fully understood by the individual and by those who must recognize and respect them. Millions of men and women the world over—certainly a great many of them in our country—are not even aware of their rights and of the rights of others, much less know how to exercise them properly. Your initial reaction to this is probably to blame ignorance and poverty—the usual stock explanations for maladies of this type. But I submit to you that many among the enlightened suffer just as badly in the knowledge and exercise of their rights, some are even worse in not giving due respect to the rights of others and to their right to exercise such rights.

For instance, how many millions of qualified voters, all supposedly literate, failed to vote, during the last elections because they were not interested enough to register or to go to the polls? Of course, we all know that this was aggravated by some degree of confusion of various kinds, but at the same time this is an indication that the exercise of a right is not always given enough opportunity or seriousness of concern, even among those

who have graduated from ignorance and economic handicaps.

All those converge to focus upon the continuing need to develop a sense of responsibility—moral responsibility, if you please—in knowing and exercising individual rights. They push us on further to see the urgency of insuring that what *Unesco Philippines* has called the “ethical dimension” needs to be given greater consideration than we have been willing to allow it in the past.

The essential question that should prod us all into thinking and action is, “What is the nature of this ethical dimension and by what means could we make it effectively pervade our educational work?”

We all know that this, in reality, is an old directive, and yet it requires today new directions and new means. We have called it many names—character education, religious education, good manners and right conduct, and now, moral education. There is lack of clarity with respect to any and all of these terms and, naturally, much of what many of us have been doing more a matter of form and less of substance, more a matter of words and less of concrete deeds. One classic example of this is the propensity to theorize in committees and conferences only to let our reports gather dust and mildew in some rarely opened glass cupboard for ostentatious display.

But how much do we really care for the human being—that little innocent child we call Pedro or Juana,—who comes to learn from us? In conferences such as this, we talk of human dignity, respect for human rights, and concern for human welfare, but how many teachers conveniently forget that the presence of Pedro and Juana in their classrooms, whether in the sophistication of city environment or in the simplicity of a remote barrio, presents an excellent opportunity to give life and meaning to the noble ideas they talk about with breastbeating or in scholarly terms?

Moral education—the ethical dimension of your work and mine—is in terms of what we do or do not do for

or with Pedro and Juana and the hundreds of little innocent children who seek our care and keeping in the pursuit of education. It is the leavening influence of the teaching process which enables children to grow into the kind of men and women needed by a sick and confused world in the continuing search for peace and goodwill. The frontiers of this are of work present unlimited challenges and opportunities for the enrichment of life.

In our work as teachers and school administrators, our goals and expectations are ideally in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In actual practice, however, there is a preponderance of concern for knowledge and we measure the effectiveness of our work in terms of what the pupils know than in terms of what they do, even less, if at all, of the quality of their behaviour. While it is true that knowledges should be the basis for action, yet there continues to be a wide gap between knowing and doing which, more often than not, is part of the reason for our slow national progress. But this is not as serious as the fact that knowledge and skills may be used for good or ill, and the continuing challenge for educators on all levels and in all sectors is how to help young people to choose at all times that which is good and virtuous and edifying.

There is a second concern which is just as vital to the life of our nation—how to extend the ethical dimension of education to those who have no chance to be in school or have to be out of school by force of circumstances. They are human beings, too. They are entitled to the same basic human rights for which their more fortunate fellowmen have more opportunity to enjoy.

One observant editor of a professional publication once said of the lot of the out-of-school population, particularly the illiterate, in these terms:

Men who are illiterate have little or no chance to become their best. Their talents remain latent. At best, they are poorly developed. They cannot have a full appreciation of the value

and significance of living because their sight is short and their reach is limited. As long as there are so many of them, as long as they are deprived even of that which rightfully belongs to them, and as long as they see that those who are more privileged with enlightenment have a decided advantage over them, so long will there be a continuing social imbalance the proportions of which could serve as a deterrent to peace.

The increasing number of educationally underprivileged is a social malady which sticks out like a sore thumb to remind society of its failure to fulfill a basic moral obligation to extend education to all. The pursuit of education is itself a basic human right of which many are thus deprived.

Moral education is for all. To consider moral education only in terms of those who are in school, by its very nature, is a breach of moral norms.

After all, those who are privileged to go to school have to live in the same society where the less privileged live. Whether we like it or not, all segments of society interact in many and varied ways and it becomes our concern to accentuate the positive and the constructive in such a way that the good might bear an effective influence upon all aspects of human life.

Unfortunately, there are many instances in which to do what is right and honorable is so much more difficult than to do what is wrong and degrading. The dilemma of those who suffer censure for their idealism and drive to do what is best; the inequities in our society which belie our claims for such democratic values as justice, respect for merit, and rule of law; the growing anxiety of the poor for the better things in life while the affluent and the powerful bask in the luxury made possible by technological progress—these and many more have a way of negating our efforts in bringing about the quality of social milieu that would be conducive to the development and exercise of man's right to be morally upright. And if I make mention of this, it is only to emphasize the magnitude of the challenge and responsibility which we all face.

Lastly, we must remind ourselves that, if we must provide an effective program of moral education, we ourselves must serve as exemplars of moral conduct. All too often, the lessons on good behaviour which we expect our students to learn have yet to be translated into our own daily life. To paraphrase what Emerson once said, *our students could not bear what we say because what we do speaks louder.*

You who are here do not have as much need to be reminded of the importance of personal example as a means of making moral education meaningful. But you could serve as a multiplier by sharing the ideas and skill you acquire from this seminar-workshop with those with whom you work in your respective schools.

In the final analysis, when the record of our individual and group efforts in enchancing respect for human rights and in making moral education as effective as it ought to be, it is not so much what happens to the world that counts; it is what happens to men as a result of what we do with them and with the world.

It is most reassuring that you have come here to evaluate the implementation of the Associated Schools Project for International Understanding in the Philippines. I trust that in addition to the traditional types and processes evaluative techniques, you will take into account not only of how many, how much, or how big but also HOW GOOD—in terms of better human lives, better social relationships, and better attitudes towards men and women everywhere regardless of color, status, or creed. Let the ethical dimension of education, whether for national or international understanding, stand out in bold relief and make its mark indelible in the hearts, minds and lives of boys and girls. Towards this end, you have assurance that the Unesco National Commission of the Philippines and Unesco International, itself, will extend co-operation in every possible way.