

EDUCATION IN MICRONESIA: TODAY AND TOMORROW

I. Public and Private Institutions

Approximately one-fifth of the Trust Territory budget is spent in educating the 34 percent of the population that presently attends school. In per-student expenditures and in percentage of the total population engaged in formal education, Micronesia ranks just about at the top of the list among Pacific countries and probably quite high among developing nations everywhere. Since the early 1960s the Trust Territory administration has made the development of human resources one of its top priorities. Recently it has declared as its official policy a universal formal education up to the twelfth grade. To realize this goal, the government has inaugurated a building program in secondary education that is aimed at providing classrooms for 14,000 high school students by 1976. It is prepared to undertake additional construction and student support costs as may be required by population increase and the closing of private schools.

Private schools, which not long ago provided an education for one-fifth of the pupils in Micronesia, will enroll at best only one out of nine Micronesian students in 1975. Because of the pressure of mounting costs, private education may represent even a smaller fraction of the total educational picture by that year. According to government projections, two years from now the number of students attending private elementary schools will be only half of what it was in 1967. Although the number of private secondary students has doubled between 1967 and 1971, there are indications that this figure will dip sharply in the future.

T.T. School Enrollment Figures

<u>Elementary</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1975</u>
Public	21,046	23,675	25,386	25,556	25,141
Private	5,854	4,402	3,620	2,860	2,820
<u>Secondary</u>					
Public	2,446	3,288	6,357	8,304	11,566
Private	784	1,342	1,564	1,500	1,500

As private schools become statistically more the exceptional road to an education, those that survive will have to become exceptional in other ways, too. It is no longer true that students must do without education just because a private school chooses to close down. Private schools must take on new roles and seek to serve special needs to legitimate their existence in a day when the theory of universal public education is fast becoming a reality. These roles will probably vary from school to school, depending on the particular needs of the community. Nonetheless, there are two long-recognized problem areas in education that will remain long after every school-age child is furnished with a desk in a classroom. It is quite possible that at least some private schools might render valuable assistance to public education in these two areas.

The first is that the school curriculum is very often irrelevant to the lives of students. There is unfortunately little relationship between a student's environment and what he studies in class. Since the curriculum ultimately depends on the teacher rather than the curriculum author or the administrator, blame is usually laid there. Teachers have been poorly trained in the past, and those Micronesians who have shown any unusual ability in the classroom have been moved into an administrative position or pirated by other government departments. Among expatriate teachers there is generally too high a turnover rate to allow for the type of continuity that would ideally blossom into curricula that are grounded in the life-experiences of Micronesian students. Private schools, with their more stable faculties of longer teaching experience, might well be able to make a contribution towards building a more meaningful curriculum.

The second is the tendency of public schools to make formal education serve strictly utilitarian aims. The goal of secondary education is frequently preparation for a job or, in fewer cases, for college, while the goal of elementary schools is to prepare a student for high school. Private education stems from a historically liberal tradition insofar as its outlook on the purpose of schooling is concerned. Because of its concern with deeper religious and human questions, it should be especially responsive to the humanistic view of education that Charles Silberman proposes: "Education must prepare people not just to earn a living but to live a life—a creative, human and sensitive life." Private schools might well proclaim this truth as they furnish a model for an education that is truly humanistic and child-centered.

2. The Education Explosion And Its Consequences

There can be no doubt that U.S. administrative policies are bringing about a dramatic "education explosion" in the Trust Territory which will surely lead to accelerated social and economic changes in Micronesian communities. In 1967 only one out of eight Micronesians over twenty years of age had completed four years of high school. By 1975 about one-half of the over-twenty population will have finished high school. It is estimated that within four years 80 percent of the high school-age population will be attending secondary school. More than 3,000 Micronesians will receive their high school certificate each year. Some 1,000 of these will probably continue their education at MOC, CCM, or any of a number of institutions outside Micronesia. Of the remaining 2,000, an estimated 1,500 will look for immediate employment either within or without the Trust Territory. If manpower needs fail to keep pace with the outflow of graduates into the labor force and if employment can not be found for them, we can only assume that a large-scale "brain drain" will be the inevitable result as it has been in other Pacific islands.

The upsurge of college graduates, although on a smaller scale, has been no less dramatic than that on the secondary level. Four years ago, there were about 100 Micronesians with the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts degree. That number has doubled since then, and the figure for 1971 will double again in four years. By 1975 there should be over 500 four-year college graduates in Micronesia, many of whom undoubtedly will assume government positions now held by the 450 expatriate employees of the Trust Territory. From the mid-70s on, however, the Micronesian economy will have to assimilate between 200 and 300 college graduates yearly in addition to the 1,500 high school graduates who will be seeking employment.

	<u>Education Explosion Figures</u>			
	<u>1963</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1975</u>
<u>Total College</u>				
<u>Graduates</u>	21	99	216	500
<u>High School</u>				
<u>Graduates</u>	100	480	948	3,079
<u>Per Year</u>				

There are presently 12,500 Micronesians working for wages in government and private jobs. It is estimated by the Manpower Advisory Council that by 1976 the number of salaried jobs will jump to 18,000—a net increase of 5,500 positions. This does not take into account vacancies in already existing positions created by retirement and replacement. Nevertheless, 7,500 high school graduates and another 500 college graduates will be fed into the labor force between now and 1976 to compete for these jobs. Even allowing for replacement of American personnel, there could be 2,000 or more Micronesians who would not find satisfactory employment in the Trust Territory.

There are, of course, other consequences of the education explosion beside the strain on society to find employment opportunities for the newly educated. Literacy in both the vernacular and English will rise greatly. There will be additional pressure to develop greater variety in everything from types of food to entertainment as the level of sophistication among the population increases. To satisfy these needs, still larger numbers of people will move from their home villages to settle in the towns where there is hope of enjoying a life-style consonant with their education. Others, finding even the towns too confining, will leave the Trust Territory for other parts of the world. An adult population in which 50 percent have completed high school will be significantly different from today's adult population in more ways than can be enumerated here.