

ADDRESS OF DR. ANGEL G. QUINTERO ALFARO, SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO, AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS, NOVEMBER 12-18, 1967

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Commissioner Harold Howe II, distinguished
guests; fellow Chief State School Officers:

Please allow me on behalf of our educational community, our Department of
Education of the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to welcome you
to our Island and hope that you have a very fruitful meeting and a nice stay while
honoring us with your company.

We are honored in having with us such a distinguished group of educators.
I consider education to be the most important commitment of Puerto Rico. We
have developed in the last 60 years with very scarce resources and under
extremely difficult circumstances a complex system of education which provides
universal education at the elementary level and has attained a high percentage
of attendance at the high school and university levels. We can look back with
pride, but there is within us no room for complacency.

We are now in a period of dramatic changes in our school developments.
In fact, many people think that we may be going too fast. However, the urgency
of the task to be done requires greater feats than those we have accomplished.
Were I forced to limit myself to the discussion of one issue of the several that
affect public education today, I would undoubtedly select because of its
extraordinary importance, this sense of urgency.

We are having now in the first grade the students who will come out from
the twelfth grade in 1980. When we speak about education in 1980, we must
realize that it is here with us. No matter how optimistically we think, we must

ask: Are we prepared to give those first graders the start in education, and all through those twelve years, the education that they will need to move in the world that they will meet? We are rapidly preparing for it, but we are not completely ready, and we must move far enough, fast enough so that we can do what should be done.

I would divide the world society at the risk of over-generalizing, into three groups. One group would be the more advanced technical societies, like the United States or Northern Europe. A second group are the type of societies to which Puerto Rico belongs, the societies that arrived later to this process of development. They have to achieve this more complex condition in fifty years, something which took those other societies two or three centuries to evolve. The ways that were used by the first group could serve the second group as a guide but cannot serve as a model. One of the great failures that we are having today in most of the world, is trying to transplant institutions, methods, ways of behaving into what we could call now developing societies.

Then there is a third group, half of the world today, is "lagging behind". One of the saddest problems of the modern world is the gap among those three groups. All these societies are moving in the direction of an increasing use of knowledge and techniques for the development of man, but instead of moving concurrently, or converging --that is, trying to have less distance between those that have the most and those that have the least-- they are moving divergently, so that a greater gap is being created.

I think that the next fifty years of the world history will be years of development. We have the resources to end ignorance and suffering all over the world. The problem is, will man have the wisdom to achieve what can be achieved? There could be three alternatives:

One is total destruction of the world. Second, a new type of enslavement that could be as bad as any type of slavery that the world has known. Third, that mankind uses the knowledge, the resources, and the techniques available, for the development of man.

For me there is no differentiation between the first two alternatives. All of us who are in education think the third alternative is what we have to pursue. If we are to succeed in developing societies we will have to develop programs and strategies that will short-circuit the process. We are forced to change many of the hypothesis that were valid for the more developed areas of the world. Most of the development of the last century has been based upon a theory of scarcity of resources and competition for them. It was considered that for many to have education, health and economic goods, others would have to be deprived. We now realize that this is a false conception. The world is aware that it must provide facilities for all mankind to develop and aware that there are the resources available for it. But there is the need of more imagination and wisdom. Thus, we come back to the consideration of the differences between peoples that was pointed out at the beginning. Although our experience may be important, meaningful even for the more developed areas of the world, it is for the developing societies that it will have greater meaning. One of our important commitments should be to help establish goals and standards for education,

welfare and health not for our own society, but for the whole world. In this respect in Puerto Rico we could play a small, modest, but very important role.

It is also true that we find in all countries the same differentiation between groups that we find in the world. The proportion of each group will vary, but in all communities you find people who already have taken advantage of education, and training and people who are lagging behind. It is not only that some people have more knowledge, techniques, abilities --and a greater ability to use more of the advantages-- but that the gap is widening. Education, for example in Puerto Rico, was for a long time the exclusive prerogative of certain groups and it wasn't until much later that it was made available to the other groups. Even now, there is no doubt that it is easier to have an education in some of the sections of our urban areas than in others and easier in the urban centers than in some of our rural areas. Here we have the same situation within our community that was pointed out for the whole world. The need also is the same, a big jump so as to break the vicious circle of inequality. We have to do in about twelve years what it took others centuries to do. I do not think that this cannot be done, cannot be achieved, within the ideology or within the institutions of our existing system of education. Some will work, some will not, but if we operate more or less as in the past the gap would widen. But the system must operate in a way so that this gap will be narrower.

Now in taking as models New York State or California we must remember that we have, in a certain sense, a greater opportunity. After all, their school systems in terms of the rest of the world, work under ideal circumstances: in both there are 12 years of universal education. It was around 6 years ago that

Puerto Rico achieved what could not even be called exactly universal education for the elementary school. We have now about 80% of our students ages 13-18 also going to school, but only half of the students who should be in the high schools are going to school. So we are a developing system. In the next twelve years, by 1980, we will achieve more or less universal education. Compensatory education have, therefore, a different meaning for us. We are not merely compensating; we are developing and we could therefore incorporate as a natural part of our system what is being called now compensatory. We have that advantage over most of the states where the system in a way failed, to do it now in another way, so that in 1980 we will not need as much of the so called compensation.

We must do it also in a tremendously more efficient way. New York now spends over \$800 per pupil and we spend about \$200. I know that we will increase that amount during the coming twelve years, we need much more resources, that looks to be a universal need, but still we may for many years, have less than half the resources of the richest. What may happen depends on the type of solution we offer to this dilemma. Some may even ask, "Is there any solution"? If there is none, then there is no solution for the greater world problems mentioned before. I think the answer will not be merely a question of funds. Maybe it is possible to achieve with \$400 what New York is doing with \$800. The only real solution is to achieve in Puerto Rico with the existing resources what others achieve with twice as much. When I visit a very good school in New York or California, I immediately ask myself what can we do with half the resources. Obviously with that amount we cannot set up in Puerto Rico an

exact replica of New York's model. But, if you look for a way of going around the model, then perhaps it can be done. You can get ideas from all places, but then you have to seek a way for doing those things in Puerto Rico. The easier way is to copy the model, but the resources would not be available and only frustration will follow. The equation should be reversed. First, determine what should be done, and then how can we do it. We have already found some answers in Title I Projects.

The best welcome I am able to give you is an outline of the efforts of our people to solve the dilemmas I have presented. In a separate paper I have made a statement about this question, which I am going to circulate.

I wish that I had time to tell you how we are trying to accomplish these objectives in Puerto Rico, but I do not. We have tried to develop a strategy for change in a system like ours. It started developing exemplary centers before Law 89-10 was approved. It established with the help of the Ford Foundation --curriculum centers-- for the development of programs, methods of teaching, and help to the teachers near the schools. We have been using television rather extensively although still in a limited way. Under Title I of Law 89-10, we have extended and reinforced these programs. With Title III funds we are developing the most ambitious attempt for integrating the universities and the Department in teacher training, demonstration and extension of the programs that were tested. Although these are new programs, we feel they have provided us a mechanism, a model adequate for change. In a developing system in any such situation we have together the excellent, the adequate, and the obsolete, the problems and the solutions. Many times

the perspective is loss by looking at particular problems, without considering the directions of change. We are, therefore, greatly pressed for planning and evaluation devices and skills. I repeat, we must go faster with less resources. We must count on all additional resources, and more of all on the devotion, imagination and great faith in education of all our citizenship. We must have the courage to make some mistakes, although we cannot afford many, because the worst of all would be not to try.