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Curing Philippine Education Maladies: **A Forum on Social Studies Curriculum and Textbooks in Basic Education by Dr. Maria Serena Diokno**

■ Maureen Macaraeg



As a new instructor in History, my classroom experiences in all my History 1 (Philippine History) courses bring forth a realization of how much undoing must be done in order for me to get through each lecture. Instead of shooting straight to my lectures, it is a sad fact that I have to start each hour-and-a-half lecture with a squint. Often, I find myself taken aback by the responses that my students give each time I do a little random diagnostic test to gauge how much my students know about the topic. I am disappointed at the answers given to me. This is not to be speaking of their incapacity. I know my students are well-equipped with the inherent capacity taken on a UP education. In fact, many of them are intelligent in ways other than the classic measures of intelligence will qualify. However, I deem this symptomatic of a problem that is rather evocative of a diachronic social issue. These are signs of a looming educational crisis that threatens to hamper social development by failing to invest on the pool of human capital.

It is a sad fact that this potential I see in many of them is not honed in their early years in school. I take the affirmative side when some of my

then-mentors, now colleagues, say that the problem of the decreasing competency of today's generation of students is systemic. And thus this concern at the classroom level is reflective of the conditions within the realm of the general educational institutions especially those that fall under the public school system.

If we are to trace the roots of this systemic problem, we find that one supposed medium of learning bears fault as to why the quality of learning is waning. In the recent years, Philippine education has met several challenges especially in the area of pedagogy at the level of basic education. Textbooks widely circulated in the public schools at the elementary and secondary levels have been found wanting of evaluation and scrutiny by experts.

The need for a panacea for this institutional crisis was then responded to by a team of faculty members, led by UP Diliman Professor of History and former Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Ma. Serena Diokno. The research, entitled, *Making a Case for History in Basic Education*, is a UP Diliman Department of History-led research made possible through the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS), funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation.

Results of this research were presented and discussed in the 'Forum on Social Studies Curriculum and Textbooks in Basic Education' held at the Bulwagang Juan Luna on February 12, 2010. This forum was spearheaded by the Department of History and Philosophy of the College of Social Sciences. The 112 participants were from different private and public schools invited through the Department of Education and Commission on Higher Education in Region I, Region II and CAR. Representatives of different private educational institutions especially from Baguio were also among the audience.

Dr. Diokno used a two-pronged approach in a synchronic way – tackling both issues in historical pedagogy on the part of the teachers and historical learning on the part of the students through the textbooks



reviewed. She began the presentation of the research results by pointing out the need to strengthen the role of History in the Social Sciences. As an historian by profession, admits to her own disciplinary bias by saying that elementary courses such as Makabayan (Gr.1-3), Sibika at Kultura (Grade 4 and 6) must be subsumed under the scope of History because the 2002 Curriculum which became the basis for the textbooks in circulation today has marginalized the said field. History is only taught at the elementary level in Gr.5. In High School, Philippine History is taught only in the first year.

She further elucidates the fundamentals of the study of history by mentioning the historical dictum – that the facts are the ‘raw material’ for any historical study but while it remains vital, “it should serve as the beginning of historical instruction, not its conclusion.”

This shoots me back into my classroom experiences. As far as I know, the problem begins in the lack of appreciation and the willingness to learn of the general population of students in any course on History because they have been forced to swallow facts without analysis or interpretation. It is true that whenever I ask my students what type of exams they had in high school and elementary, they would all say identification that would require maximum utility of memory, in short, rote learning. Dr. Diokno mentioned in the forum that despite the obvious requisite of doing memory-work, this does not guarantee competence especially when juxtaposed against the rubrics of historical learning. This is a faulty means of bringing historical consciousness to the students, more especially the children at the elementary and secondary levels.

In the forum, the textbooks reviewed by the

committee’s study revealed why there is less competence among students. She cited different pages from textbooks that bear major conceptual and factual errors. Because of this, there is already a violation of the basic tenets of history at the level of facts: veracity, verisimilitude and validity of data. She notes

that despite assertion of other authority figures regarding the multitude of supposed ‘historical evidence’, it does not guarantee the quality of data fed to the children’s minds.

Because of errors contained in the textbooks alone, there are different failures in common comprehension skills. This explains why the students exhibit problems in areas like understanding thoughts, relationships between sentences, and those areas that belong to the connotative level of comprehension. The students are also unable to fully develop historical competencies like chronological thinking, contextualization of events, analysis and interpretation, historical writing. Furthermore, three types of bias are present in the said textbooks: *ethnic bias*, *colonial bias* and *gender bias* which bear negative implications to learning aimed at developing an understanding of Philippine history and society.

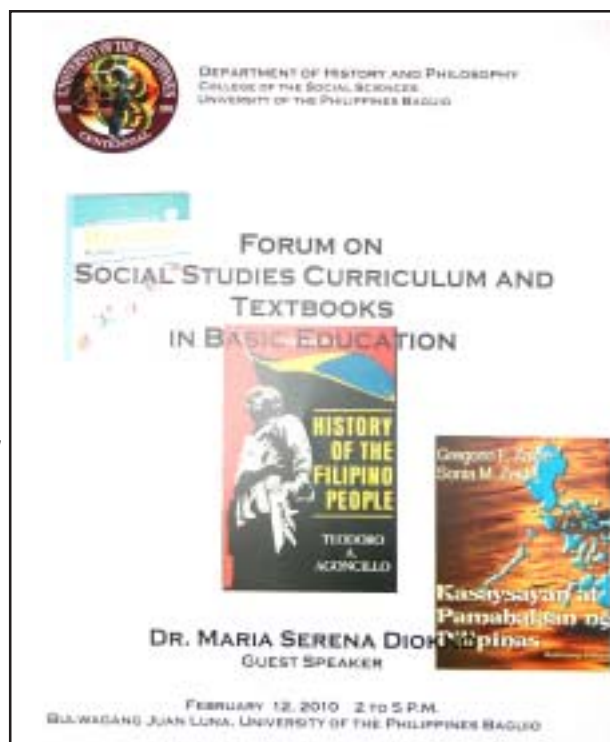
Of all these observations from the research conducted, what is most striking is the process by which these textbooks themselves are reviewed. Whereas perfect scores ought to mean the textbooks are error-free, the scales used for evaluation allow for *the possibility* of errors such that in this scale, a perfect score accommodates as much as 1-3 major conceptual errors. This explains why the textbooks with errors remain in circulation even until now. A question on how we, as academicians and mentors, can correct these was raised in the open forum. Dr. Diokno

believes that there is a possibility of limiting these errors through teacher training outside the classroom and other pedagogical techniques that correct the errors for the students. She also believes that there should be pro-active evaluation of the textbooks by the teachers themselves as a pragmatic means to help mitigate the problem.

Hence, with this pending issue on textbooks, we see only the tip of the iceberg when we want to understand the systemic problem that hounds Philippine education. There is a bigger challenge up ahead but it remains that the first steps in addressing these issues may very well be done at the micro level - within the classroom by teachers like us.

The development of the human potential of a nation must be dialogical between the actors. A proactive stance as teachers to ensure that quality education is means toward this goal; however, there remains much to be desired about the sincerity of the students towards their participation in the said matter.

Hence, when all has been said and done, when all textbooks have been flipped from cover-to-cover, what remains is the challenge to continue purging the educational system of its phantasmagoria and making sure the student’s eyes are wide open to see and understand their own society and its history. ■



Meeting Special Needs at the Village of the Insightful

■ Janice Bagawi

The usual ratio of deaf people to those who are not hearing-impaired is one to one hundred. In the village of the deaf,¹ however, four in one hundred persons, or 150 in a village of 3500. Here, deaf are still a minority; yet, they are not marginalized. Rather, their entire village, including those with normal hearing, opted to adopt sign language as the major mode of communication.

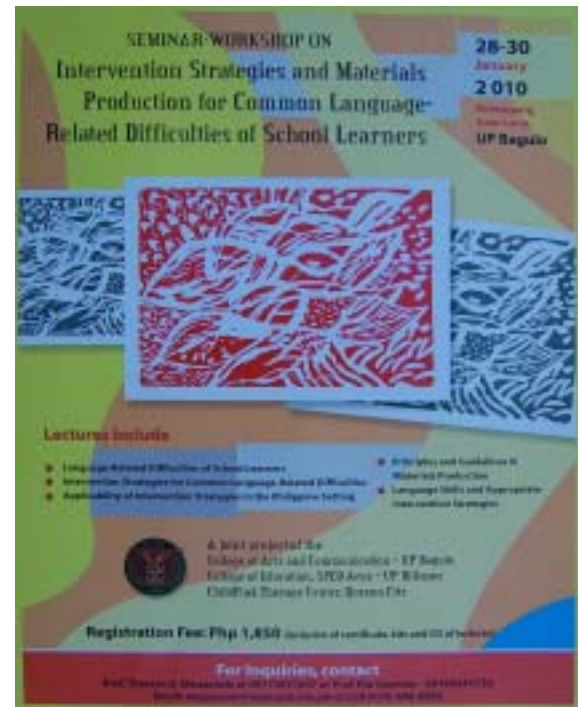
The story inspires insight into how to address the needs of special children, or those who have been summarily classified as “mentally retarded (MR),” learning disabled (LD), “slow learners (SL),” or simply “*bobo*” or “*tanga*.” These are the children who exhibit learning difficulties—the inability to spell, make sense of what they read or express themselves intelligibly.

Recognizing that special learners have special needs, the Graduate Resource Center (GRC) of the College of Arts and Communication in cooperation with the SPED area of the College of Education, UP Diliman held a three-day activity dubbed “Seminar-Workshop on Intervention Strategies and Materials Production for common Language- Related Dif-

ficulties of School Learners” from January 28-30, 2010. In attendance were parents, teachers and administrators from the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), Region 1 and Region 2.

In his keynote address, Dr. Edilberto Dizon, head of the SPED Area of the College of Education of UPD, asserted that seminars and workshops which merge language and special education is “a pressing priority” not only because “there are many children who cannot read” but also because good language skills and effective language teaching have far-reaching consequences. Language, after all, encompasses all aspects of our everyday lives.

In the plenary sessions of this seminar, language related difficulties of school learners were identified, intervention strategies for these language-related difficulties, as well as principles and guidelines for materials production were provided, and the applicability to the Philippine setting of intervention strategies was evaluated. In the concurrent sessions, participants received further instruction and training in appropriate intervention strategies and in designing and packaging activities and exercises in one of the following language delays: listening comprehension delays, oral expression (readiness and pragmatics) delays, oral expression



(verbal-analytical) delays, word reading and reading comprehension delays, and spelling and expression delays.

Lutz-Sol Aplaon-Vidal summarizes the points for consideration in application of intervention strategies stresses must be learner centered. She summarized the points to consider through the mnemonic device: LEARNER. First, the Learner’s personality, learning style and specific needs must be the foremost concern. Consideration must likewise be given to the Environment and added that by “making the lessons ‘close to home,’” attention can be sustained and the child is motivated to perform. “Age- and lefel-appropriate, brief, realistic, interesting and goal- specific” classroom Activities can then be utilized to teach the target skills. In regard to the use of Resources, Aplaon notes that “indigenous materials



and those found at home and in school” work best as these will be things which the learner will already be familiar with. Novelty is also one mark of a good intervention strategy. Lessons must be designed to provide **Experiential learning**, with mastery and generalization of the skills as the “ultimate goal.” Finally, she stressed the importance of being able to provide **Reinforcement**, which need not necessarily come in the form of things. Learning is also reinforced with verbal encouragement, and physical and visual support, such as a “pat on the back or a ‘thumbs up’ sign.” Afterwards, for application and reinforcement, the participants were tasked to work in small groups to identify a specific delay which they observe in their student/s and then create a lesson plan to addresses the delay.

The speakers and facilitators stressed that learning difficulties are best called “delays” because that is what they most likely are. With appropriate intervention, these delays could be overcome. Labels such as those mentioned above are not only hurtful but also unhelpful, says Dr. Dizon. His and his colleagues’ advocacy is to administer intervention strategies that would normalize learners with difficulties, not schemes that enclose them in constricting labels and/or classes, i.e. Section Mentally Retarded, Section Slow Learners, and the like. In light of this, another advocacy of theirs is the inclusion of learners with special needs in regular classrooms.

During the open forum, Dr. Dizon challenged the teachers and the administrators to allow students who cannot read, or spell, or have abysmal grade averages to move up to the next grade level.

Naturally, this drew indignation from many of the participants. The suggestion was met with incredulity by some: “You mean it is acceptable to promote a student just because he or she is a special child?” “What about students who are



no-read and no-write?” Another expressed some concern about how parents of the other students might react: “What about other parents who might complain?”

Dr. Dizon and his team, all practicing SpEd specialists, explained that teachers and parents of these learners should focus on what the learner can do, and on what is meaningful to the learner. According to them, the basis for moving the child on to higher grade levels must be competencies in real life skills, not academic competencies or grades based on pencil-and-paper measurement tests. “Does the learner have other skills even though he cannot read? Can she do other things even if she cannot write?” Standards for regular learners and learners with delays should not be the same, they asserted. Dr. Dizon, in particular, noted that in such cases, equity, rather than equality must be the foremost concern. According to him, “there is no equality in inclusion; there can only be fairness.”

Rather than treating everyone in the same way, learners must be addressed according to their needs and with concern for long-term effects of the classroom experience. “*Ano ang future ng estudyanteng limang taon sa grade one, apat na taon sa grade two [and so on]?*” the speakers asked. It is a hypothetical question that is worth mulling over.

Undeniably, there are advocacies presented by the facilitators in this seminar-workshop that seem too progressive for comfort. Yet, there is an adage that goes: if you keep on doing what you have always done, you’ll keep getting the results you’ve always gotten. I cannot help but think that these advocacies are not only insights, but also visions—of a village where learners’ special needs are met, where special students aren’t burdens that the village has to grudgingly contend with, but a treasure the village can optimistically bank on as productive members of society. (Here, again, I am reminded of another proverb: Where there is no vision, the people perish.)

I’m convinced that if we too go against the grain and change in our ways of viewing special children as liabilities rather than assets, and work towards their inclusion in normal life, and help them to move up to greater and more complex skills and abilities, then the vision of a village where special needs are met would materialize. Then, like the people in the village of the deaf, we may, perhaps earn the moniker “Village of the Insightful.”

1 Margalit Fox. 2007. Village of the Deaf. Discover Science, Technology, and the Future, July 2007.

(The writer is a MALL student and graduate assistant at the Graduate Resource Center, College of Arts and Communication.) ■

Taboan 2010: Wordsmiths Feast in Cebu

■ Scott Mágkachi Sabóy



Casino Español de Cebu was abuzz from 10-12 February with what Taboan 2010 Festival Director Marlinda Tan described as “a feast of words.”

Day One’s main course for breakfast was Dr. Resil Mojares’ plenary talk which he intriguingly prefaced by asking, “Will Magdalena Jalandoni Gonzaga make it as National Artist?” He was referring, of course, to the great Hiligaynon feminist author, whose over half-a-century writing career (she died at 87) churned out an astounding literary treasure of 122 short stories, 36 novels, 31 plays, 7 novelettes and 7 volumes of essays.

Plunging right into the heart of the thorny issues involving the National Artist award, he pointed out that “the current design and practice [of the selection process] reflect and confirm existing inequalities of conditions of literary production in the country.” For those of us who were not in the know, Mojares’ plenary speech was quite a revelation. Dessert came during the open forum with several delegates pitching in their own tasty slices which included issues on “Manilacentrism” in the publishing industry, literary decentralization, the contested notions of the “national” and the “regional,” and lack of appreciation for the contributions of our

own writers, among others.

The afternoon dishes were as sumptuous as the morning meal, with mouth-watering servings of “Visayan Aesthetics,” “Regional Children’s Literature,” “Translation,” “Ecoliterature,” “Culture-Bound,” “Critical Reviews,” “Novel Thoughts,” and “Travelling Ideas.”

The literary banquets over the next two days were no less delectable: “Living Fiction, Poetry, Plays and Non-fiction,” “Mainstream Publish-

ing,” “Writing for a Living,” “Writers as Artists,” “Writing Erotica,” “Poetry and Performance,” “Lit Online,” “Revealing Lives: Auto/biography,” “Writing Histories,” “Writing Using Dreams,” “Writing and Spirituality,” “Writers’ Block,” “Writing Ethnicity,” “Songwriting,” “Writing and Family,” “Writers’ Groups,” and “Organizing Workshops.”

A common frustration among the delegates was not being able to have a taste of all the panel offerings as discussions were held in parallel sessions. Nevertheless, none went home hungry.

Aside from the hearty academic repasts, one yummy highlight of the event was the abrupt creation of the newest addition to our Party-list system of representation, ANG DALDAL, a nationwide organization headed by its honorary president, Ricardo de Ungria and its chairman, Vim Nadera. Its headquarters is still to be situated somewhere but rumors say it’s definitely going to be erected just outside a cabinet somewhere in Manila near the ANG LADLAD HQ. Plans to recruit brave ones to man the organization’s local chapters are still being ironed out. Its blogsite, which will soon be latched with *WordPress* to

save money, will be launched soon.

Not surprisingly, this new group flaunting a banner with the tagline “Napasubo lang ako noon!” and projecting itself as a bunch of penitent “gay-straight” converts, is reportedly giving the jitters to Danton Remoto and his “immoral partylist.”

Grapevine crawling from the Taboan site to the Mactan-Cebu International Airport has it that ANG DALDAL might join forces with the *Machong Moral Majority* (MMM...), the Pinoy version of Jerry Falwell’s *Moral Majority*, led by a homophobic solon. Reliable sources also say that one of MMM...’s decidedly politically incorrect jingles for the 2010 Polls happens to be “Rain, Rain, go away!”

No one in the *ANG LADLAD* camp is crying yet, but Remoto and his Pink Army are reportedly conjuring up a literary and legal storm as a countermeasure to this newest threat to their bid for a Congressional seat.

So it would seem that one of Taboan 2010’s biggest questions aside from what Dr. Resil Mojares posed in his plenary speech is, “Will Danton Remoto Make it to Congress?”

Abangan! ■

(Photographs from <http://magkachi.wordpress.com>)



New scholarship Grant for UP Baguio

College Summer Extension Programs call for Participation



The Beta Gamma Phi Fraternity, through its representative Mateo Dacanay, Jr. extends assistance to deserving freshmen of any 4-year degree program of UP Baguio through the Beta Gamma Phi (BGP) Scholarship grant. The scholarship shall take effect in the First Semester of AY 2010-2011.

Present at the signing of the memorandum of agreement this February 2010 are (from R-L): Mario Dacanay, Florita Supnet-Wilhelm, Lydia Dacanay (from UPB Faculty), and Carmen Guiang, (Seated from left) Chancellor Priscilla S. Macansantos, and Dr. Mark Noel Ventura. ■

April 8-10

College of Science invites educators in the secondary and tertiary levels as well as professionals in the related fields to the 17th Summer Institute in the Natural Sciences and Math (SINSM). The SINSM is an annual extension service that provides training and continuing education for mathematics and science teachers.

April 26-30, 2010

The College of Social Sciences Research Institute (SSRI) will hold a seminar-workshop dubbed "Training on Local Adaptation to Climate Change." The activity is a 5-day capacity-building course in social preparedness for executing natural ecosystem-based strategies for local adaptation. Through an integrated and holistic approach, the training will cover the basic concepts on climate change and skills in enabling methodologies for social resilience. These skills include: vulnerability assessment, disaster and risk management, resource valuation and sustainable financing.

More details on the College Extension Program are available at the upb website: <http://www.upb.edu.ph>



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