



EF'S ALTERNATIVE CURRICULUM: BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Roderick G. Galam

There is a need to make education respond to people's needs and conditions. Universal education must not be limited to the end goal of just providing education for everyone. In pursuing the program of "education for all", the needs, conditions and aspirations of people must inform the curriculum and pedagogy used in educating them. If not, then we assume that people are homogeneous and therefore there is no need to differentiate - a uniform and "universal" education suffices.

It is precisely because of this view that educational reforms have failed. In reaching out to more people, the traditional and "official" method, according to Dr. Victor Ordonez, Director of the Basic Education Division of UNESCO (Paris), has been to expand existing educational systems (1995). He says that this "more of the same" response does not and cannot solve educational problems. He cites the experience of ethnic and religious minority groups, remote island and mountain populations, nomads, immigrants, refugees, the disabled and street and working children who continue and remain to stay out of school because existing or available education systems are unsuitable (and therefore useless/not functional) for their needs, circumstances, aspirations and difficulties.

In the Philippines, one of the organizations that had been most active in making education responsive, meaningful and relevant to the lives of the Filipinos was the Education Forum (EF). It provided effective education to different groups of people and radical alternatives to existing educational systems.

EF, established in 1979, was the task force on education of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP). It was a service agency formed to assist educational institutions, groups and individuals

engaged in the reorientation of Philippine education towards justice and social transformation. EF responded to the need "to suggest, try out and implement new perspectives, content or pedagogy - in fact an alternative to existing arrangements" (Doronila, 1991:4). This desire to help effect social reforms through education informed, among others, EF's literacy and numeracy programs.

EF's Basic Literacy and Numeracy Program

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical basis of EF's alternative program for basic literacy and numeracy was derived from Paulo Freire's work entitled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire, a Brazilian educator, believed that the traditional system of education which he called the banking concept of education was an instrument in perpetuating the "culture of silence" in which the "wretched (majority) of the earth" were deeply mired. In this banking education, the teacher, the lone source of (legitimate) knowledge, deposits to the students. The students then memorize as the teacher will withdraw the knowledge through tests/examinations. Freire proposed the use of the problem-posing education which makes use of the dialogic approach. It affirms and respects the capacity of the learner to perceive his/her world - reflect on it and act upon it. This combination of reflection and action Freire called praxis. The dialogic approach to education which recognizes the critical capacity and creativity of people would lead to the people's conscientization - an awareness/consciousness of the oppressive, cruel and unjust situations and structures in which they find themselves. The approach makes the learners and the teachers (hereon called facilitators) equal

In pursuing the program of "education for all", the needs, conditions and aspirations of people must inform the curriculum and pedagogy used in educating them. If not, then we assume that people are homogeneous and therefore there is no need to differentiate - a uniform and "universal" education suffices.

