

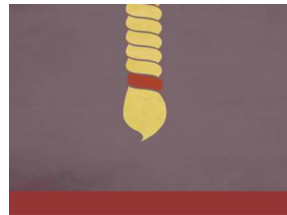
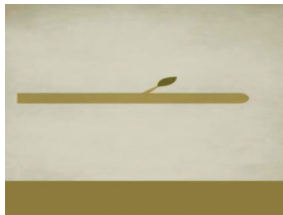
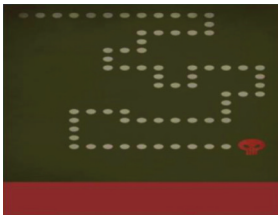
UP Diliman General Education Program: Classroom and Beyond

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Introduction

On almost every occasion or event in UP where General Education (GE) is discussed, the term “Tatak UP” seems to inevitably surface. What makes a student a UP student? Ano ang “Tatak UP”? It is, to us, a question of identity, which can be likened to the question “Ano ang ‘Tatak Pinoy’?” And because “identity building” starts or ought to start early on, anchored on (a) solid foundation/s, let’s begin with something connected to our early lives—childhood . . . and children’s literature, something close to my heart.

Look at each of these pictures and tell me the “identity” of the children’s story to which it refers or from which it is taken or based. The first 3 pictures are from the www while the next three are scanned pages of picture books.





If you know the first three stories (Hansel and Gretel, Pinocchio, Rapunzel) yet not the next three (May Higitang sa Aming Bahay written by Rhandee Garlitos, illustrated by, and published by Adarna House in 2009; Bruhahahahaha Bruhihihihihi written by Ma. Corazon Remigio, illustrated by Roland Mechael Ilagan, and published by Adarna House in 1995; and Anong Gupit Natin Ngayon? written by Russell Molina, illustrated by Hubert Fucio, and published by Adarna House in 2012—all of which are award winners), what does that possibly tell us about “Tatak Batang Pinoy”? What children’s stories do we all share as Filipinos? What stories are common among Filipino children, regardless of socio-economic status, language, etc.? What is the “identity” of the Filipino child? It’s not exactly an easy question, is it?

And now we ask, “What is the ‘identity’ of a UP student? What qualities do all UP students share as ‘Iskolar ng Bayan’? What is common among UP students, regardless of College, program, etc.? What is the ‘identity’ of the UP student? What is ‘Tatak UP’?”

Is it UP students’ shared knowledge? Is it the skills and competencies common among them? Is it the qualities UP students share? Is it the values they all hold dear? Are these knowledge, skills, competencies, qualities, and values what the GE program develops or should develop?

What is a UP GE program? Or, what should it be? Where is it going? Or, where should it go?

This paper seeks to start a conversation or even conversations on the vision, implementation, and direction of the UP Diliman GE Program. It raises basic questions—without necessarily offering any answers. After all, there's no real conversation if the same party asks the very questions it raises.

Vision of UP (General) Education: Beyond the Noble and Beautiful

In the UP System website is the tagline “shaping minds that shape the nation.” “Shaping minds that shape the nation” is a noble and beautiful “purpose,” if it may be called such, for all the Constituent Units (CUs) of the System—and one can't argue against it. However, in light of the mandate of UP as the National University expected to “perform its unique and distinctive leadership in higher education and development” (RA 9500), it is good to ask these three important questions:

1. What kind/s of mind?
2. How will these be shaped?
3. And for what kind of nation?

These are important questions because answers to them necessarily have implications for the quality, process, and product of UP education. A GE program cannot and should not exist in isolation from a vision of UP education as a whole. So we recall—and rephrase when and where appropriate—the questions raised earlier in connection with GE and “Tatak UP”:

- What kind/s of mind should UP students have? What knowledge should they all share?
- How should the minds of UP students be shaped so that they will have such knowledge? How should they learn or be taught?

so that they will not only have such knowledge but also develop necessary skills and competencies to do what they must with this knowledge?

- What kind of nation should such highly knowledgeable, skilled, and competent UP students shape? What use should such a nation have for UP students' knowledge, skills, and competencies? What value do such minds and qualities have? What values should UP students have? What vision and sense of nation should they have?

And to these questions we add:

- Where is GE in all these?
- Where should GE be in all these?

These are pressing questions. Who has the answers to these questions? Who should answer these questions? Where do we start? Where do we go?

In the context of "One UP," should the answers come from those on the ground, who have to face the everyday (and at times, harsh) realities of "shaping minds that shape the nation"? What if the answers of those from one "part of the ground" differ from those of another "part"? Or, should the answers come from those on "the top," for everybody "on the ground" to follow and be guided by?

Whatever the case may be, IF we believe that the aforementioned is what "Tatak UP" and GE are about—or, at least, what they should be about—then, won't the answers to such questions, in effect, make up the philosophy, framework, content, objectives, methods of inquiry, and competencies of a GE Program?

"How?" you may ask. Let's look at each question or set of questions more closely.

Implementation of an Educational Vision: The Difficult and Daunting Reality

Let's start with the first set of questions:

1. What kind/s of mind should UP students have? What knowledge should they all share?

The present UPD GE Program aims "to ensure that the domains of knowledge contain a healthy mix of disciplines." We need to ask if this is still what we want for our students—if the knowledge they have to learn will still be within the arts and humanities; social sciences and philosophy; and math, science, and technology domains. Moreover, with current buzz words like "interdisciplinary" and "multidisciplinary," what does "to ensure that the domains of knowledge contain a healthy mix of disciplines" now mean?

This leads us to the next set of questions.

2. How should the minds of UP students be shaped so that they will have such knowledge? How should they learn or be taught so that they will not only have such knowledge but also develop the necessary skills and competencies to do what they must with this knowledge?

Do "interdisciplinary" and "multidisciplinary" ways of seeing mean that GE courses will no longer be offered by particular departments and colleges, which are disciplinary in nature? Will GE courses now be taught in an "interdisciplinary" and "multidisciplinary" manner? Does this mean that they will be taught by an "interdisciplinary" or "multidisciplinary" team of instructors, each one with disciplinary expertise? Or, will each one be taught by an instructor who is "aware of various disciplines," no matter his/her field of expertise?

Such questions on process are corollary to issues concerning methodology. In this regard, we should ask if we still want to use the following methods of inquiry in the delivery of GE courses: quantitative and other forms of reasoning, and interpretive and aesthetic approaches.

No matter the methodology, there must be specific skills that we want to develop among our students. Currently, GE courses are expected to develop the following competencies among Isko and Iska: communication (oral and written); and independent, creative, and critical thinking. Do we still want to develop these among our students? Are these all the competencies they need to excel in their endeavors? Are these enough to perform well their duties as Iskolar ng Bayan?

If your answer to the last question is “No,” then we should seriously think about the last set of questions:

3. What kind of nation should such highly knowledgeable, skilled, and competent UP students shape? What use should such a nation have for UP students’ knowledge, skills, and competencies? What value do such minds and qualities of UP students have? What values should UP students have? What vision and sense of nation should they have?

These questions call to mind Luisa Doronila et al.’s 1993 landmark study entitled “The Meaning of UP Education.” The results of this evaluation of knowledge management, attitude and value formation in UP Diliman showed that UP students then were not so concerned about the nation as they were with their own interests. This prompted some people to ask if UP had lost its “soul.”

In this time of internationalization and the new UP Charter, it is good to do some serious reflection or “soul searching” on what we are educating our students for, and what GE has to do with it. Though UP is expected to be a global and regional university, a graduate university, and a research university, it is also a public service university. Moreover, as

the national university, it is “committed to serve the Filipino nation and humanity. While it carries out the obligation to pursue universal principles, it must relate its activities to the needs of the Filipino people and their aspirations for social progress and transformation” (RA 9500).

In light of the above, let us recall the objectives of the current GE Program, and check if such expectations of UP are reflected therein: broad intellectual and cultural horizons; nationalism balanced with internationalism; awareness of various disciplines; and integration of knowledge and skills.

Now, we should ask: Are these still the expected outcomes we want of GE? Are they enough to help serve the purposes of UP education? Are they the pieces needed to form UP’s “soul”? Is this “soul” the “Tatak UP”?

So many questions—where are all these going?

The GE Program Direction: The Necessary Next Steps

This paper disclosed early on that it raises basic questions—without necessarily offering any answers. Do you have any answers?

Once you do, think about how the following matters will be addressed: curriculum; teacher training; instructional materials; monitoring and support; and evaluation.

Until then let’s keep conversing. Let’s keep learning and evolving!

Read on 18 August 2014
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