

THE ESSENCE OF DEVELOPMENT AS EPITOMIZED IN FORMAL AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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This paper is an attempt at sharing insights and learning generated from the two modes of education: formal education and non-formal or alternative education. Specifically, it will present a comparative analysis of the substantive and methodological aspects of these two modes and raise issues for a continuing discourse between the academe and non-government organizations.

Focusing on the theme of peace and development and on methodology, the salient experiences of the author, accumulated over 30 years of teaching Sociology, will be discussed. The issues raised will then be juxtaposed with the author's involvement with NGOs in peace building and development with the internally displaced persons (IDPs), farmers, and working children of Lanao. Furthermore, research methodology will be discussed, with traditional research methods analyzed against participatory methods employed by NGOs.

For education to be an effective catalyst for societal transformation, the academic community must be actively involved with the marginalized sectors of society. An effective educational system responds to social realities through strategies that alleviate poverty and other forms of inequities, and eventually contribute to peace and development. Moreover, continuous exploration in designing methods for teaching, research and extension work that address problems of total and integrative development should be prioritized.

This paper is a modest attempt at sharing some invaluable personal experiences arising from exposure to two modes of education: the formal educational system and the alternative mode in the delivery of education. In this discussion, strong and weak points of the substantial and methodological issues in both modes that are deemed crucial to education shall be raised. To some extent, concerns on the role of the system/structure vis-à-vis the individual on the issue of development will also be brought up. The issues and concerns raised here will be treated only at the surface level.

Salient experiences learned in the university shall be juxtaposed with the NGO experiences undergone specifically in development intervention work

with the marginalized sectors such as the poor farmers, working children, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) of Lanao. The teaching-learning process involving the attitudes/behavior of students in the formal educational setting vis-à-vis the development workers shall also be discussed. Research methods, on the other hand, shall be dealt with where the traditional research methods are presented against the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) that are employed by NGOs as the basis for development intervention.

The Notion of Development and Education

Here are some pertinent questions related to development and education: “What kind of country do we envision to have? What kind of people do we want? What do we want in life or what do we really want to become? And how should education appropriately respond to prepare young people for life?”

Because education is intertwined with development, it would be good to know what is meant by “development” at this point. For having neglected other more important dimensions, the “economic-oriented paradigm” that views development as synonymous with economic growth and looks at it only in terms of material and economic sufficiency has long been debunked. Development should therefore ensure the total well-being of the human constituents beyond the economic realm for it to be really worth its name.

“Development” has been defined in various contexts. In 1968, the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) in Rome defined it as economic growth with equity through participation. The 1985 Conference on the End of the Decade for Women in Nairobi identified equality and peace as components of development. Moreover, the Brundtland Commission in 1987 as well as the UN Conference for Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, conveyed the kind of development integrated with environmental concerns. In addition, the NGO Forum of the Social Summit articulated initiatives that placed people at the center of development and underscored the structural cause of inequities. In almost the same vein, the UNDP Human Development Report in 1992 covered “poverty reduction, productive employment, social integration, and environmental regeneration” as aspects of development (cited in Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995, p. 45). All these are aptly captured in the contention that development “is the aspiration to overall human development that gives substance to the quest to nationhood, democracy, and world peace and Ecological stability.” (David 2001, pp. 157-158)

On the whole, therefore, development is the total process which includes economic, political, social and cultural aspects. This means that development is a process which prepares people in part for participation in political affairs to enable them to lead full lives. An ethical dimension, in this regard, is moreover important to consider where development brings about improvement in the quality as well as the quantity of life. Quantity of life pertains to the amount of economic and political participation of the people. On the other hand, quality of life refers to social, health and educational concerns (cited in Muhi et al. 1993). It is in the latter that education fittingly comes in.

Another interesting definition of development is associated with freedom. Showing that the quality of our lives should be measured not by our wealth but by our freedom, Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Science, revolutionized the theory and practice of development. According to this author, expansion of freedom is the principal end as well as the principal means of development. There is a remarkable connection that links instrumental freedoms of different kinds (political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security), and the social opportunities are those that facilitate economic participation in the form of education and health opportunities. The role of individual freedom, in an agent-oriented view, is undeniably important as a form of social opportunity for education and development. To quote:

Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other... (Sen 1999, pp. xii,11).

In 1985 the theme of the 8th UGAT National Conference was "The Anthropology of Education: Its Contribution to Nationhood." A paper dealing on social restructuring and cultural reconstruction through education raised the point that Philippine education has no definite direction and summed it up thus: "It's this today and it's that tomorrow." After almost 20 years, do you think education is different today? Does it have definite directions? Whatever its state today, it has always been argued that education determines the character and pace of our economic and social development. Considering that no social service or government institution reaches as many of the populace as does the educational system, it can pose a significant impact when properly availed of as a mechanism for development.

The challenge of development is to address social inequities which may emanate from ethnicity, class, gender, age, and the like. For education to be an effective catalyst for social transformation, it must respond to social realities through strategies that shall cause the removal of various forms of unfreedom and inequities. And while there are structures and systems to reckon with, the individual human being plays a crucial role in this regard.

Some Substantive Issues of Education

In any organization, its vision, mission and goals imbue the reasons for its being or existence. Let us examine a sample vision statement of a state university which is: "A world-class institution of higher learning renowned for its excellence in science and technology and for its commitment to the holistic development of the individual and society." This vision underscores global competitiveness and excellence at the individual and societal levels.

Moreover, its corresponding mission states: "To provide quality education for the industrial and socio-economic development of Mindanao with its diverse cultures through relevant programs in instruction, research extension and community development. " The fundamental nature of an academic institution is embodied in its three interrelated trilogy of functions of instruction, research and extension. However, there is now an emerging fourth function, that is, resource generation or IGP for short, for academic institutions to survive. In most cases, the faculty members focus only on teaching with only a few undertaking research and extension work. This makes the academe oftentimes alienated from the hard facts of the outside world for a variety of reasons, e.g., having no interest in, or the inclination to do, research, whether from the absence of logistical support, being overloaded with teaching assignments or having no knowledge and/or confidence to do research. And more likely than not, when focusing only on teaching, a number are confined only to the traditional classroom setting and heavily reliant on books and other printed materials to perform their tasks.

On the other hand, here is a sample vision statement of an NGO in Iligan City: "We envision a democratic, pluralist and just society where people of all beliefs, ethnicity, races and religions are empowered to direct their destiny; live in peace and unity amidst diversity; and with their active and meaningful participation in all development processes reap the benefits of environment and child-friendly, gender sensitive and sustainable socioeconomic development." The framework of development intervention employs both the needs and rights-based approaches. The needs-based approach responds to the needs of the poor and the marginalized by

recognizing their existence and identifying strategies that would alleviate their situation. It organizes and mobilizes peoples in communities in improving their skills and providing them technical, material and financial support. The other approach is the rights-based approach which involves promoting and upholding the rights of the poor and the marginalized. It recognizes that the poor are not just poor but are made poor by structures and systems and that they have to be organized and mobilized so they can assert and defend their basic rights.

In pursuing development interventions (this refers to the systematic actions and processes in order to influence the process of change or achieve a desired change mutually recognized and desired by the intervening organization and other stakeholders), the programs and services are designed such that the institutional development program includes resource mobilization and generation, human resource development, promotions and advocacy, communication and information, and partnership and linking. To assess whether the project objectives are attained, a monitoring and evaluation tool is employed. The project planning matrix or logframe usually contains a summary of the goals, objectives, results, and activities which are measured against objectively verifiable indicators, ways and assumptions or conditions necessary for the achievement of the objectives.

To exemplify the above, let me cite an NGO's program on children purposely designed to alleviate the conditions of working children. It used to maintain a community-based center in the depressed barangay and to employ street-based intervention where functional literacy classes were conducted in the market area for out-of-school youths and working children to enable them to know the rudiments of learning in situ. Now, a Working Children Resource Center serves as a drop-in and learning center where life skills are integrated. These life skills include health care, resource management, environment, and social skills.

In the case of a community-based disaster response and peace building program that was established as an offshoot of the war in Maigo, Lanao del Norte in 2003, the development workers also work in situ with the internally displaced persons. In both the children and community-based disaster response programs, the parents of the working children and the internally displaced persons (IDPs) are organized into peoples' organizations (POs) to make them help themselves and to prepare for any threat or disaster that may happen.

The children's program consists of 10 components: child casework management referral; functional literacy and resource walk-in center facilities; theatre, creative arts and music workshop; educational sponsorship

and referrals; mentoring and special training on leadership; feeding, health and basic services; income-generating program for children; livelihood assistance and awareness-raising for parents; IEC on child's rights; and policy advocacy. On the other hand, the community-based disaster response program has the following components: health and medical services, peacebuilding and awareness raising, community organizing, networking/linkaging, and advocacy. The essence of development can be discerned from the VMG, approaches/strategies, and program components of the delivery of social services which include the alternative education.

In the formal educational setting, on the other hand, students and teachers generally seem tame. There are methods, procedures, techniques or learning activities which have no meaningful purpose but the subjugation of the individual (David, 2001, pp. 129-130). This can be seen in all levels of education where sometimes the mentor becomes the tormentor. Then there are contributions exacted from students to support projects that are not really meant for the students' direct welfare. There are regular exams that neither test nor advance learning but which must be taken because they are required. There are voluminous reading materials for photocopying and paper requirements to accomplish (which sometimes are not checked by the teacher) without any bearing on life's realities but they must be read and written. There are numerous subjects prescribed, whose theoretical or practical value is taken for granted. There are also political loyalties manifested in the exchange of employment/promotion. It is no wonder then that faculty members instead of being critical and analytical become submissive to their deans/directors/chancellor. And the list can go on and on.

The formal education mode as seen in this light is then most likely an elitist kind of education. Because of exorbitant tuition fees, only those who can afford go to school and in order for state colleges and universities to survive, they have to exact relatively higher fees from their students. The strength of formal education also lies in the breadth and depth of disciplines or fields of specialization. The program offerings attest to the expertise of its faculty and strong logistics.

Let us take another issue involving the delivery of social services during emergency cases. I am referring to the armed conflict between the Philippine Military and the MILF in March 2003 which affected the towns of Maigo and Kolambagan, and other neighboring areas of Lanao del Norte. While the government officials had still to convene to discuss the nature of the war and to pass a resolution to allocate funds, NGO development workers were already in the afflicted communities distributing relief goods until late evening. In response to the crippling effects of the conflict, crisis intervention measures adopted by many NGOs operating in Lanao also included

psychosocial development work among children, women and other male adults. At the time of writing, the culture of peace training is an on-going activity.

But what about the scenario in the academe? There is this unceasing dissection of the historical roots, the typology of peace/conflict, and the structural causes of conflict. The academe generally operates on theorizing and proffers recommendations. It is uncommon for a teacher to organize and respond to the situation on one's own volition and political will.

It is noteworthy that our university takes pride that it is the only school in the whole country requiring its students to take History 3 (History of Filipino Muslims and other Indigenous Peoples of MINSUPALA). At the same time, it is sad to note that a number of our students (and even the faculty) have not fully addressed their personal biases towards the Muslims (or Christians as the case may be). This suggests a disjunction between the cognitive level and affective levels that consequently manifests in behavior (to Festinger, this is cognitive dissonance). For instance, in my Race and Ethnic Relations class of 31 during the second semester 2003-2004, only 2 have gone to Marawi (one was a Maranao herself). And come to think of it - travel time to Marawi City is only less than an hour! Last September 2004, when a field trip to Maigo, a Christian-dominated area, was organized for my class on peace/conflict studies, some students admitted that they did not even tell their parents about the actual destination out of fear that they would not be permitted to go.

This pattern has been observed in other schools, in the Iligan community and other places which reflect both the individual and structural factors. However, NGOs go to the conflict-ridden areas without hesitation, whether they are in the Muslim or Christian-dominated areas. But sometimes while NGO/development work boosts the spirit, it also saps energy in some instances, e.g., when a development framework cannot be readily applied in the field for some reasons. There are also cases when the NGO staff does not practice what they advocate thereby manifesting incongruence between NGO principles and individual behavior.

In handling courses dealing with peace/conflict studies, race/ethnic relations, and gender and development in the university, experiential learning involves the inner dimension with individual human beings as the necessary component for development. No amount of analysis dealing with the systems, structures and institutions, I suppose, could substitute for the individual factor to effect transformation. Even in class reflections/evaluations, the meanings and interpretations of theories, field immersions and documentary films are mediated by personal experiences. Those who have personal trauma would most likely rekindle their past when viewing

conflict, violence or war-related cases. This partly explains why studies of structures per se do not guarantee change in outlooks of life. For instance, in an NGO where self-transformation for peace is a part of the culture of peace modules that are intended for grassroots learning, it is duly recognized that inner peace within the individual level plays a vital role in peace advocacy.

Comparing the two modes, one can see that the alternative mode of educational service delivery is fine-tuned to total development as gauged by the nature of projects/programs implemented notwithstanding actual field immersion, networking, and advocacy which are oftentimes not done in formal educational settings. The NGO development program for the working children and internally displaced persons as an alternative education model caters to the marginalized sectors on the holistic level and incorporates the four pillars of rights: survival, protection, development and participation.

Education for transformation should therefore basically aim at service and social orientation. This is reflected in Article II, Section 17 of our Constitution which states that education is mandated "to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress and promote total human liberation and development." In this regard, then, the promulgation invites more queries: Which of the two modes is more attuned to this goal? Which of the two targets its clients to attain total human liberation?

In addition, it is worthwhile to raise these closely related nagging questions: What kind of attitude and behavior have we inculcated among our medical doctors who go back to school to take up nursing so as to cater to the global demand? And why is there a swelling trend of nursing enrollees who aim to serve the elderly of other countries leaving behind their old parents and grandparents who equally need utmost care? Why do we have college graduates and even PhD holders who occupy prominent positions in the country who go abroad as caregivers? Up to what extent can we say that this is within their individual freedom to pursue greener pastures abroad? Who, with one's sanity intact, would want to leave one's family behind for years in order to earn a living outside if our nation that is endowed with rich natural resources could have readily provided gainful employment to its citizenry? Indeed, it is difficult to define these as typical of character building and national development. Or is national development now outlived by the borderless world and by the unparalleled expansion of "electronic consciousness"? This is also a new cultural form that education needs to reckon with.

In terms of sustainable funding, what is the difference between NGOs receiving funding from cause-oriented organizations or humanistic/philanthropic institutions from those which get relatively meager funding allocation from the government like our state-owned colleges/universities

(SCUs)? Which modes of delivery of services aim at equity and development when formal education only gets lip service but not actual budgetary allocation? In fact, by the year 2005, the maintenance and operating expenses of SCUs reportedly will become nil. These give rise to more questions that negate both ideas that 1) democratization of access to schooling narrows the gap between the rich and the poor; and 2) the belief that schools produce knowledgeable and skilled individuals and that therefore expansion of the educational system will lead to the development of a nation. There are piles and piles of issues that confront us. There is no need to repeat them as we are all aware of the political and economic shambles our country is in and these have tremendous impact on social services such as health and education.

The Methodological Issues

The continuous quest for and transmission of knowledge is inherent in the academe. The process in which raw materials are obtained and transformed into finished products, which take the form of knowledge is real power (from the old adage: "knowledge is power"). In this sense, access to and control of knowledge is a potent mechanism to develop people.

Cognizant then of the need to improve societal conditions, searching for answers to identified problems can contribute to improve policies and programs. In this regard, high quality research should not only meet the scientific criteria, but foremost research problems formulated should be relevant to community needs and contain findings that are comprehensible and accessible to potential users. We cannot deny that most research findings do not reach the population they are intended to benefit. The traditional audience for most researchers is usually other researchers. This may be attributed to its elitist-oriented character and expert-generated activity where researchers tend to work in isolation in swivel chairs and air-conditioned rooms. In fact, without consulting the people/communities concerned, problems are conceptualized in the halls of the academe. The above usually happens when it is purely an academic research for a PhD or MA degree, for an economic enterprise, for productivity/promotion, or when it is an obscure policy paper.

In the past, the strong positivist and utilitarian residues placed more premium on quantitative research that is accompanied by sophisticated statistical tests and associated with the top-down, expert-focused development strategies and programs. A paradigm shift has now occurred

where research has become participatory as a process. This method is characteristically people-oriented and people-controlled in all its phases. It is participatory in the sense that there is maximum involvement of people in the conceptualization, implementation, evaluation, monitoring and total decision-making processes of any development program/project that directly concerns them.

According to Segovia (1981), research must always be an option for the development of people. This is the essence of research in development-oriented work as used in rapid appraisal tools such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or Participatory Action Research (PAR) model. Chambers who popularized the use of PRA contends that this is a "family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance, and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act."

PRA/PAR promotes an integrated perspective, the collaboration of multiple disciplines (inter/multidisciplinary), and an employment of the multiple methods of research or triangulation. The use of PRA or PAR as an alternative research methodology is employed by NGOs as a guide in the implementation of programs/projects. To cite an example, the PRA in 1999 undertaken by an NGO in Iligan City was used as the basis for development interventions in two barangays to identify problems, resources, and potentials as bases for community action planning and implementation of a sustainable integrated gender-based rural development program for the farmers. Implemented as rural development and sustainable agriculture, the components included community organizing, appropriate technology and sustainable agriculture, socioeconomic support program, resource access improvement and peace building.

PRA's strength lies in data gathering done together with the people, analyzing data together with them, and learning from them. What is more important in PRA, to reiterate, is the very fact that the conceptualization of problem, data analysis and interpretation lie in the informants/participants unlike in the conventional method. Any experienced researcher may commit a glaring mistake when he/she interprets the data from his/her perspective (this is an issue behind an etic viewpoint). In PRA, the informants validate the analysis and interpretation of data; thus, misinterpretation of data, if any, is very minimal. Research then becomes a dialectical process between community and researchers and between gathering and interpretation. The method also facilitates investigation, analysis, presentation, and learning by rural folks themselves eventually allowing for self-critical awareness. Thus, participatory approaches in development came about to provide the means for disadvantaged sector to enhance their capabilities to overcome obstacles that deny them access to important resources. It therefore highlights the

active participation of local people to collectively respond to their pressing needs and concerns.

Action-intervention expectedly follows participatory action research. Research is thus viewed not merely as an information-seeking activity to benefit the outside investigator but involves “the production of knowledge (research) undertaken simultaneously with reality modification (“educative cum action”). It is parallel to the integration of theory and practice/praxis (Chamber, n.d.; Guerrero, 1995; Polestico, 1998). This brings to the fore the essence of Freire’s dialectical process-- analysis, action, reflection, and then back to action.

On the other hand, PRA also bears some weaknesses. The very advantage of the PRA as a method may also be its own weakness particularly when the intervention program is yet to come. It entails time to develop project proposals and to have them approved. That the proposal may be stamped with disapproval is not a remote possibility. But in the meantime, it raises the expectations from the community.

In the formal educational setting, it is perceived to be difficult for an academic institution to require usage of PRA/PAR as a tool in the formulation of a thesis or dissertation, much more for the academe to go to a community and do research/ investigation without commitment to help address identified problems. The respondents are usually the subjects of research. It is much more difficult to offer assistance without the assurance of resources. But PRA/PAR tools are useful as basis to develop proposals for extension and community service programs of colleges/universities.

The Need for Flexibility and Balance

As we all know, our country has been experiencing radical changes because of global events that have cascaded down into the locality. Cognizant of the multifarious demands of a dynamic society, there must be a certain degree of flexibility in the teaching-learning process. It is imperative to make our education responsive to the real needs and aspirations of our populace across class, ethnic and gender lines. For education to be an effective catalyst for societal transformation, the academic community must consider involvement with the marginalized sectors of society such as the poor farmers, indigenous peoples, street/working children, disadvantaged women, internally displaced persons, and the like, in any way it can. In so doing, the social transformation of our educational institution becomes part of the transformation of the greater society. In envisioning for development,

education should not be alienated from the economic, political, and other sociocultural structures. Education must be able to conscientize theory and practice in these areas.

There should be continuous exploration in designing teaching, research methods and extension work to address the varied substantive and methodological issues so as to facilitate total and integrative development. It is a challenge for academicians and development practitioners to realize the richness of their knowledge, skills, and experiences and to become partners in building individuals and communities. An effective educational system responds to social realities through approaches and strategies that shall diminish "unfreedoms" and inequities and eventually contribute to peace and development. Otherwise, when formal education fails to re-connect with the concerns of society and effect relevant and meaningful changes, then "deschooling society" (to borrow Illich's concept) may emerge as an attractive option. And when this happens, we, the academicians shall lose our relevance in the formal educational system.

While situations are diverse, there should then be an incessant process of assessment, analysis, reflection and action especially when there are impediments as to methods, process and strategies in both the formal and alternative educational systems. In this light, it is important to cite C. Wright Mills' contention that the interplay of personal biography, social structure and history is a necessary element in understanding realities. Likewise, Giddens' "reflexive sociology" should be also reviewed wherein social relations are not fixed but mutually impacting.

Moreover, postmodernism affirms that there is no overarching explanation for the way things are on the ground that life is the cumulative result of human experiences that are evolving and changing. While there is a specific context and no definite underlying structures that could fully explain diverse human conditions, the continuing discourse must strike a balance between object-subject, agency-structure, individual-collective, social-economic, humanism-scientism, inner/internal-outer/external, center-periphery, local/regional-national, national-global, nomothetic-idiographic, atomistic-holistic, micro-macro, individual-structural, emic-etic, and quantitative-qualitative dichotomies and their corresponding middle grounds and combinations or eclecticism. Nevertheless, it really matters if we look inward to find human meaning and to determine the root causes of our happiness and unhappiness in life.

But most importantly, formal education must be viewed as a systematic preparation for life in its totality. In conclusion, I want to tie education and development; allow me to quote Vic Hao Chin, Jr, a proponent of transformative education:

The aim of education is to prepare young people for life...to help humanity attain a state of collective harmony and mutual benevolence on an enduring basis. The goal of many progressive schools and alternative education methods is to correct the present imbalance of school curricula, as well as to provide an environment that will nurture wholesomeness of character in the individual. (Hao Chin 2003, pp. 2-3).

The essence of education, therefore, hinges on the development of sound character in the individual. Beyond the structural level, there should be efforts directed towards acquiring "life skills" or capabilities that will address the demands of society and integrated understanding of life whether through formal, non-formal, or alternative educational mechanisms. It is only then that we can hopefully improve the quality of life more effectively for humanity.

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