

Education mindsets at school opening

Thanks to the mainstream media, Monday's school opening littered with the usual chronic negating mindsets such as the perennial lack of classrooms, lack of teachers, lack of books and instructional materials, the usual scapegoat for the low quality basic learning our public education system provides our students, in particular to the ever marginalized in our society. These mindsets continue to thrive as if unending.

Even the proposed implementation of the K-12 basic education system, comprising kindergarten, six years of elementary, four years of junior high school and two years of senior high will never make one single step ahead since the proposal would further bury the mindset into the consciousness of the poverty enlaced Filipino as additional crosses to carry. With all the K-12 program's noble objectives of maximizing our basic education to be more foundational, integrative, competitive, responsive and practical, still the K-12 would be perceived as simply a reinforcement of the mindsets of our people and the system itself.

Besides, the persistent deficiencies of teaching professionals, infrastructure, and hard copies of learning materials have always been intertwined inconveniently or otherwise with the economics and pecuniary interests, (therefore the corruption that prowls beneath) especially among local government units (LGUs), congressional budgets and pork barrels, and business stakeholders — in fact, anything within the purview of vouchers, orders, "SOPs," "tong-pats" commissions, including text books, uniforms, broomsticks and breakfast noodles, among others. This is not to mention the fact that our country's education budget is one of the lowest in the Asia.

In 1972, Angelicum College through the creative-innovative leadership and mind of Fr. Rogelio Alarcon, OP (TOYM Awardee, 1972 for Education), started the Non-Graded System, "no wall, no ceiling, no floors" open classroom that paved the way to a more pragmatic approach to education, namely home schooling or home study program. To date, fingers could count the number of schools which have engaged in this cost effective program, yet there is so much potential in solving if not eliminating the problem of the "education mindsets."

The problem seems to occur in a cyclical motion because the proposed solutions are also within the circle of the mindset. To wit, if the problem is "lack" then the solution is to "add" — of course, that would be "eternal!"

Albert Einstein once said that when a problem occurs at a certain level, the solution cannot come from the same level, neither from the higher level, but from a lower level. It is a Merry-Go-Round or a Ferris-wheel for this country — we can never get out of this cyclical motion.

TABLETS OF STONE



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Fr. Alarcon's idea of the home study program would eliminate the mindsets and deficiencies. But the system should get out of the cycle or "out of the box." For instance, the Dominican priest believes that mentorship is an alternative to the lack of teachers. Mentors, could come in variety of forms, from parents,

college graduate siblings, community leaders, volunteers, church ministers, retired professionals, among others, at least for basic education. Just as respectable members of society are being "deputized" to perform some specific roles in the community, including police functions, why can't teaching be deputized similarly.

Open classrooms as far as Fr. Alarcon is concerned, are basically the home, the first venue for informal learning, including barangay halls and church parish centers. Who says that formal education can't be given in an informal setting where there could be more intimate bonding between parents and students and among siblings; learning anyway is more integral when the disciple-learner relationship is at its best.

As for the problem of textbooks and materials, Fr. Alarcon suggests an alternative, namely, that the Department of Education would print learning modules to be distributed free to the home schoolers. These self-learning modules in the form of loose leaf on installment basis could be updated annually with supplementary pages. Even broadsheets or tabloids could publish the modules in exchange for tax refund incentives or other forms of ex-deals with government or could be downloaded and printed in Internet shops. Validating the learning acquired through this delivery system could be done through a national testing through the existing system or other forms of formal accreditation.

With the Angelicum experiment, this home schooling program has worked with outstanding success. In fact, former President Joseph Estrada adopted the program at the beginning of his term but was ignored by the next administration. If the present administration is bent on eliminating the traditional mindsets of education, then President P-Noy and DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro should look seriously into this program, instead of barking on the unpopular K-12 system.

But the real moral benefit of this type of education program, where the learning experience goes beyond the mindsets is also the re-orientation of the national awareness that education is everybody's concern, not only the school's where parents and society seem to have relegated such function totally. Bringing to mind the Peace Corps of the late President John F. Kennedy, the spirit of volunteerism which rightfully belongs to the Filipino psyche (*bayanihan*) would be stirred and instilled in the hearts of Filipinos caring for Filipinos — because at the end of the day, no one else would but ourselves.