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The Education Forum experience in alternative education

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 Title of experience

The Education Forum experience in alternative education: A post-mortem appraisal

1.2 Category of practice/experience and brief description

This paper presents the case of Education Forum's unique experience in alternative education, in both the formal and informal/non-formal systems. EF was re-established at the height of the Marcos administration and was thus a response to the concrete conditions then.

Guided by a liberative and transformative philosophy of education (i.e., education as a tool for social justice), EF undoubtedly contributed to a new breed of teachers and their charges, their students who are nationalists, critical and appreciative of the ideals of democracy and equality for all. EF also made the learning and teaching process relevant and creative, without losing sight of its ultimate purpose to develop skills and form values. These are ideals and values that remain in the hearts and minds of thousands of teachers and students who were reached by EF.

Although EF (i.e., national office) no longer exists, its experience stands as one of the best practices in the Philippines and in the Third World, because of its enduring impact on the education sector and the society as a whole.

1.3 Name of person or institution responsible for the practice or experience

Education Forum (EF) – the task force on education of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP), the organization of the heads of different Catholic religious orders or congregations in the Philippines.

1.4 Name and position of key or relevant persons or officials involved

Prof. Diego Quejada III, Executive Director
 Sr. Ching Bravo, Executive Director
 Ma. Luisa Doronilla, Ph.D., General Consultant
 Sr. Ma. Luz Mijares, OSA, Chairperson of the Board
 The Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP)

1.5 Details of institution

Not applicable since Education Forum has already closed down

1.6 Name of person and/or institution conducting the research

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Raymundo D. Rovillos was a volunteer facilitator/resource person of EF from 1986-88. In 1989-1990, he became the Executive Secretary of EF-Baguio. Many of the insights in this paper, unless citations are made, are based on the author's personal experience working with EF.

1.7 Details of research person/institution

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2. THE PROBLEM OR SITUATION BEING ADDRESSED BY THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE

In terms of budgetary allocation, education is given a low priority. From the 1980s through the early 1990s for instance, education received only 7.2% (or lower) of the total national budget. This allocation was not sufficient to cover the needs of the sector. This explains the chronic problems of lack of teachers, classrooms and other facilities throughout the country. The quality of education is also not satisfactory. In 1977, 97% of the students in the public

elementary school grades were unable to develop sufficient skills in reading, writing and arithmetic. For every elementary graduate, it has been found that only two-thirds of what should be learned was actually comprehended and absorbed by the student (see Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports Report, 1977). These trends continue to manifest themselves up until today.

The government also has a policy of privatization of secondary and tertiary education resulted in its policy of privatization of these sectors. "As monetary gains motivate private education, its principle of social service is lost in the effort to minimize the cost of production in order to maximize profits" (Quejada, 1986:34). In 1972 for instance, the summed-up profit of eight big schools (Arellano, Centro Escolar University, Far Eastern University, FEATI, Manila Central University, MLQU, University of Manila and University of the East) was P8.28 million. In 1975, their profits increased to P14.66 million. This means that between 1972 and 1975, the profits of these institutions increased by 77%.

As government involvement and subsidies progressively decreased and education for profit dominated the higher levels, many students were economically "selected off" as they progressed up the ladder of educational attainment. In a study published by the Presidential Committee to Survey Philippine Education (PCSPE) in 1970, it was found that out of 100 students entering grade one, 60 usually would be able to finish grade six; 40 would graduate in high school; and only 4 would finish college. In other words, the educational system posted a mere 4% finishing rate. This trend persists today.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE AND ITS MAIN FEATURES

This section is lifted from Prof. Diego G. Quejada III and Ma. Luisa c. Doronilla, Ph.D., "Alternative Education: The Education Forum (EF) Experience", in *Towards Relevant Education: A General Sourcebook for Teachers* (Quezon City: Education Forum) 1986. The article was revised and edited by the author for this paper.

Nature and objectives

EF was the task force on education of the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP), the organization of the heads of the different Catholic religious orders or congregations in the Philippines. Established in 1968 and revitalized in 1974 as a direct response of the Catholic religious in the country to the conditions brought about by the imposition of

martial law in 1972, the AMRSP now has eight task forces which look into and undertake remedial steps and long-term programs in the areas of its apostolate in the Philippines, such as health, urban and rural missionary work, justice and peace, and education.

As a service institution, EF was organized to provide assistance to public and private educational institutions at all levels, as well as to groups and individuals engaged in the reorientation of Philippine education for social transformation. Specifically, it sought to

- (a) define and clarify the theological basis of education for the transformation of Philippine society for the promotion of justice and peace in this world;
- (b) create an awareness of the state of Philippine education and of the need to promote an inter-faith, nationalist and people-oriented education as the Filipino educators' contribution to social transformation;
- (c) undertake programs to assist educators in carrying out the reorientation of Philippine education;
- (d) assist educational institutions in designing, preparing and implementing their particular social orientation programs; and
- (e) establish solidarity and working relationships with other institutions, and with other groups and individuals, in the country and abroad, who adhere to the same vision and mission.

Origin and growth

In November 1979, the Asian Consultation on Education (ACE), hosted by the Major Religious Superiors of Women in Thailand, was held in Bangkok to discuss the contribution of education toward change in society, to come to a common direction regarding the role of schools in relation to society, to establish solidarity and to learn from one another's experience in education.

More specifically, the consultation sought the critical examination of the philosophy, objectives, instruction, curriculum content and process in schools and non-school systems in an effort to bring back education to the mainstream of people's lives in Asia.

EF was established in 1979 as an outcome of the preparation of the Filipino delegates to this conference, through the Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines (AMRSWP). It was organized to fill the need already expressed by so many in the education sector, particularly in the Catholic schools, to redirect their school programs so that they may help promote the ideal of education for social transformation. Such a need was an outcome of a higher level of social awareness brought about by the nationalist movement of the early 60s and 70s and by the reexamination of the role of

Catholic education in the Philippines on the basis of principles contained in the Vatican II documents.

EF started out literally as such: a forum among a number of educators who met regularly to exchange views on promoting social awareness through relevant education. The enthusiastic response to these exchanges underlined the need for the free-wheeling and relatively loose forum to take on a regular and structured form. Toward this end, an EF secretariat was organized in early 1980 upon the return of the Filipino ACE delegates from Bangkok. In October 1980, the EF Board was constituted. Thereupon, EF was adopted by the AMRSP.

Services, projects and activities

From 31 July to 2 August 1981, EF sponsored a National Consultation on Education. The conference was really meant to be a gathering of leading personnel in education to come to a common analysis of the prevailing state of Philippine education and draw up directions about what must be done to respond to such a state of affairs. The National consultation contributed greatly to a more concrete formulation of the objectives of EF as an institution that would provide support services to educational institutions and groups.

The following were the major components and activities of EF:

(a) The Teacher Assistance Program (TAP)

In its brochure, EF described the TAP as a “fortnightly publication that comes as a series of supplementary materials for teacher and classroom use. It was designed and prepared to respond to the needs of conscientizing educators who have taken on the task of teaching effectively in order to promote social awareness and social transformation.”

The idea for the TAP was suggested by Mrs. Letizia Constantino when she, together with her husband, Prof. Renato Constantino (a famous nationalist historian), addressed the EF National Consultation in 1981. She argued that the teacher occupies a major role in influencing the consciousness and outlook of students and, as such, should be equipped properly for that role. The TAP was thus a modest effort to reach out to teachers, inform them of the basic issues in society, and contribute to their “re-education” process toward understanding the nature of the society they live in, the nature of the transformed society that is envisioned and, therefore, the kind of education - in terms of values, attitudes, social awareness and skills – that they are called to promote. Back issues were published in book form, as *Issues Without Tears*.

Some of the titles released were the following:

History From the Point of View of the Filipino People (1981)

The Agrarian Problem of the New Society (1981)
The Oil Giants in the Philippines (1981)
Key Economic Terms (1982)
Education: Handmaiden of Economic Policy (1983)
English or Filipino? (1983)
The Status of Filipino Women (1983)
The Aftermath of the Aquino Assassination – A Nationalist Appraisal (1983)
Some Common Political Terms (1984)
US Bases, US Bosses (1984)
Educating for Democracy (1984)
Nationalism in the Classroom (1984)

(b) *The School for the Advancement of Nationalist Education (SANE)*

In order to promote the continuing education and development of teachers and education personnel, EF, aside from coming out with publications, held seminar-workshops, training programs, symposia, study programs, discussion groups and non-exposure immersion. All these efforts were organized in the SANE. Specifically, the following were the components of the SANE:

- (i) The Summer Institute for Faculty Development was a regular study program for teachers consisting of seminar-workshops in the different disciplines (social science, religious education, language, natural sciences, etc.).
- (ii) The Social Orientation Seminar (SOS) was a two-and-one-half seminar-workshop for schools and other educator-groups given upon request. The SOS aimed to bring participants to an analysis of the state of Philippine education within the context of the past and present developments of national and global realities. It also aimed to define the role of the educator in the promotion of education for social change.
- (iii) Lectures were given on request to teachers and school personnel, usually in fora organized as part of a school's faculty and personnel development programs, or to other education-related groups. The most frequently requested topics were The History of Philippine Education; The State of Philippine Education Today; The Present National Situation; and What is Nationalist Education?
- (iv) Symposia on current issues were regularly sponsored by EF to bring to public discussion current and burning issues on education and society. Some of the topics in the symposia were The Present State of Language Teaching in the Philippines; and The Current Economic and Political Crisis and Its Implication on the Schools.
- (v) Training workshops were organized regularly, sponsored by EF or given

to faculty groups upon request. They included SOS Facilitators Training; Seminar-Workshop in Research; Speakers Training Workshop; and Workshop in Operationalizing the School's Social Orientation.

- (vi) Inter-school Disciplinary Workshops (ISDWs) were study groups of teachers of a common discipline from different schools. The ISDWs provided teachers the forum and organization through which to keep abreast of developments in their areas of specialization, discuss and analyze the state of teaching in their respective fields, and draw up projects and activities in response to these problems. Over the years, EF facilitated the organization of ISDWs of teachers at the secondary level in the following disciplines: Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Communication Arts: English, Communication Arts: Filipino, Religious Education and Health Education.
- (vii) Study Circle for Leading Administrators was a regular discussion group that EF organized to keep school administrators abreast of the latest developments in Philippine education and society. Some of the topics brought to discussion in the study circle were Values Education of the New Curriculum (PRODED), The National Situation, History of Philippine Education, EDPITAF and World Bank Textbooks: Teaching, Teachers and Instructional Materials Today.
- (viii) Exposure-Immersion of School Personnel was organized by EF upon request from faculty (or student) groups. It aimed to concretize to the participants the realities of Philippine society, which constitute the social context of Philippine education, through exposure-immersion with workers, peasants, urban poor and tribal Filipinos, or to areas that reveal social problems like prostitution, militarization, poverty, environmental pollution, etc. The exposure-immersion consisted of the participants' actually staying for three to five days in a particular area, subsequent reflection/processing of the experience and planning.

The activities of the SANE were made possible in coordination with and with the cooperation of resource persons from agencies and institutions like the Cultural Research Association of the Philippines (CRP), the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), IBON, Council for Primary Health Care (CPHC), Foundation for Nationalist Studies (FNS), Third World Studies (TWS), Parents Alternative, Inc. (PAI), Science and Society, Episcopal Commission on Tribal Filipinos (ECTF), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) and the Teachers Center of the Philippines.

(c) Alternative Instructional Materials Project (AIM)

Started in 1983, the AIM sought to respond to teachers' demand for relevant instructional materials in their respective disciplines of specialization.

The project produced sourcebooks for teachers' use that were keyed to existing textbooks, thereby providing teachers with an alternative and critical perspectives in assessing the value of topical emphases being promoted in these textbooks and thus enabling them to intervene more directly in the instructional process. The sourcebooks contained a critique of the prevailing educational system, an assessment of the state of teaching in the discipline concerned, an analysis of instructional materials currently available for the discipline, a series of alternative or supplementary materials and readings, case samples of lesson planning and other suggested classroom activities, as well as a bibliography of other instructional and audio-visual materials and suggested readings.

The **AIM** was undertaken in cooperation and coordination with teachers from different schools, the **ISDWs**, and resource persons from other agencies and institutions. Sourcebooks intended for high-school teachers' use were produced for the following disciplines: Communication **Arts**: English, Philippine History and Religious Education.

(d) Education Resource Center (ERC)

Started in 1983, the ERC, as a project, established a resource center for instructional materials, research and publications of EF.

The general objective was to create an information and materials source base in support of the overall efforts of teachers and education personnel in reorienting Philippine education. The center provided data or resource materials that EF and other people could use in the construction of supplementary or alternative instructional materials for classroom use, seminars and workshops, educational research, and other related efforts.

Specifically, the objectives of the **ERC** as a project were the following:

- (i) to put up a databanking system that would contain available information on the prevailing as well as alternative orientation, content and methods of the country's educational system;
- (ii) to produce audio-visual materials that could be used by teachers and others engaged in education-related efforts;
- (iii) to publish a monthly newsletter that would inform teachers and other beneficiaries **of** latest developments and issues in education as well as instructional materials that they could use in their work; and
- (iv) to publish studies and research outputs on education.

Solidarity

EF also extended its services to other institutions and groups in the country and abroad as well as to those outside of the education sector. EF con-

ducted training workshops and lecture series with medical and health personnel, church groups, student organizations, and cultural and artist groups. EF hosted exposure-immersion programs for visiting foreign delegations like a group of Japanese nuns in August 1983 and 10 teachers from the Australian Teachers' Federation in January 1985. EF was the co-host of the Second Asian Consultation on Education in August 1984 and of the Asian Students Association Seminar Workshop held in Manila in 1984. All these were part of EF's solidarity efforts as it realized that its activities could not be isolated from the efforts of other people to bring about social transformation.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE AND ITS ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

Vision and mission of EF

EF was established out of a vision of society – a society that is “just, free and democratic”. Prof. Diego Quejada III, EF's Executive Director, wrote:

“Justice means ensuring for ourselves as country and people what truly is due for our survival and development. Freedom means liberation from continuing colonial exploitation. Democracy means the promotion of basic human rights and interests, especially those of the majority.”

Given this vision of society, EF upheld a philosophy of education that was geared toward the attainment of a just society. This philosophy of education was articulated by Dr. Ma. Luisa Doronilla (1986:482) thus:

“Our view of alternative education in [the] contemporary Philippine context ... refers to the creation by and among teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel, students and their parents of a critical and analytical counterconsciousness whose nationalist and people-oriented character will contribute to a significant reorientation not only of Philippine education but also of Philippine society in general.”

Organizational structure of EF

As provided in its constitution, there was the EF General Assembly which met once every two years and was composed of five representatives from every region, the secretariat and the members of the incumbent National Board.

The highest policy-making body of EF was the National Board. It met at least once a year and was composed of two representatives from each of the four regions and seven members elected at large.

In between meetings of the National Board, the National Executive Com-

mittee was responsible for the conduct of EF affairs and for the implementation of the policies and decisions of the National Board. It was composed of the officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary) elected by the National Board, and the Executive Director.

The National Secretariat implemented the decision of the National Executive Committee and conducted the day-to-day affairs of the task force. It was headed by the Executive Director who was appointed by the National Board.

Except for the General Assembly, regional chapters had virtually the same structure, comprising a regional board, a regional executive committee and a regional secretariat.

Regional chapters were encouraged to plan and initiate their own activities depending upon the specificities of the education situation in their respective regions and the capabilities of their staff, within the context of EF's general orientation and the specific objectives given earlier.

5. PROBLEMS OR OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND HOW THEY WERE OVERCOME

In 1995, the Education Forum-National Chapter decided to fold up and stop its operations. Several factors, both internal and external to the organization, contributed to this unfortunate event. One factor was the lack/absence of sustained financial support, especially for its regional chapters. As early as 1989, at a time when EF's contribution to transformative education was increasingly appreciated by educators, and when its major component programs were replicated in the regions, EF's major funding agency CEBEMO suddenly decided against granting funds for the necessary and much-needed financial support. The stated reason was the redirection of financial aid from Third World countries to Eastern Europe, in the light of the collapse of socialist regimes there. The "unofficial" reason was that the funding agency apparently believed accusations that EF was a communist front and that it financially supported leftist organizations. These allegations were of course denied by the EF leadership.

As a result of the absence of funding, several regional chapters like the EF-Cordillera almost became inactive. Their services dwindled, while only a pool of volunteer teachers and school administrators kept the organization going. The EF-National Office responded to the financial crisis by aggressively generating funds by submitting proposals. It was finally able to secure funding from an Italian funding agency for its "Education for Production Project". However, other problems internal to the organization itself would eventually lead to the closure of the program.

6. EFFECTS OF THE PRACTICE/INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCE

In 1988, EF conducted a nationwide study to evaluate its impact on the “target beneficiaries”, the teachers and other school personnel. Generally, the study revealed very positive feedback on EF’s activities. The following were the highlights of the evaluation study:

Among the teachers, EF’s activities resulted in the following:

- (a) Inculcation of values such as nationalism, participatory democracy, co-operation and service/commitment to the poor and marginalized in society.
- (b) Development of the teachers’ skill of critical thinking – With the tools of social analysis that the teachers learned from EF, they were able to interpret/analyze day-to-day events more critically.
- (c) Enhanced pedagogical skills – Indeed, EF introduced various teaching methods and strategies that were reflective of the institution’s liberative and transformative mission. With their newly acquired skills, the teachers also perceived their profession with renewed vigor and rigor.
- (d) Empowerment – The alternative education that EF espoused undeniably enlightened the teachers not only on the social realities, but also about their (the teachers’) rights. As a result, they realized the need to organize themselves as a progressive organization or as unions.

These changes in the teachers’ values, skills and attitudes, and their entire world view, also affected their students and, to a certain extent, the students’ parents. The students had a better understanding and appreciation of their subjects, since their lessons were always contextualized in their own realities and experiences. Thus, education became not just a mirror of social realities and individual experiences; it was also integral to and inextricably linked with the mainstream of the people’s lives.

These values, skills and predisposition continue to endure in the hearts and minds of teachers and their students despite the closure of the national office and the stoppage of national operations. In this context, we can say that EF’s principles and objectives have been achieved and sustained, even if the institution itself is no longer around.

7. SUITABILITY AND POSSIBILITY FOR UPSCALING

It could be noted that the philosophy and program of alternative education that EF adhered to was too radical, if not revolutionary, especially from the point of view of the state. Therefore, EF’s goals and objectives could not be fully attained if Philippine society itself was not fundamentally reformed.

This is also the reason why EF's endeavors were limited to the private (i.e., sectarian schools) sector, which exercised some degree of autonomy from the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), particularly in designing the curriculum. However, there should have been no problem in upscaling EF activities and projects. In fact, even before the EF-National Office decided to shut down, there were already efforts on the **part** of the government to appropriate some of its programs and activities. These are discussed in sections **8** and **9**.

8. SIGNIFICANCE FOR (AND IMPACT ON) POLICY-MAKING

EF's success stories caught the interest and attention of educational policy-makers not only in the Philippines but in other countries as well. In the Philippines, EF gave significant contributions to the Education Committee (EDCOM), a body that was formed by the Corazon Aquino government to formulate policy recommendations in order to reform education. Among EF's most significant policy recommendations to the EDCOM were the following:

- (a) Establish and recognize functional literacy programs (emphasis on education with production), especially in marginalized communities of the urban poor and indigenous peoples of the country. Official recognition of functional literacy programs will be in the form **of** accreditation. Graduates of these programs shall be accorded credits parallel to the formal educational system.
- (b) Reinforce the values-education program of the DECS. EF consistently lobbied for the inclusion of nationalism, democracy and equity as the core values that should constitute the values-formation component at all levels of education. The EDCOM has incorporated this suggestion in its policy recommendations.
- (c) Strengthen the research capability of institutions of higher learning. This is currently being implemented by the newly established Commission on Higher Education (CHED).

9. POSSIBILITY AND SCOPE OF TRANSFERRING TO OTHER COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES

The EF experience can be transferred to other countries. Its own growth as an institution is testament to the possibility **of** development and expansion. EF started off in 1979 with only a few Catholic schools and a chapter in Metro

Manila. In 1986, EF expanded into a national network of five established chapters and three formative chapters spread throughout the Philippines. The following were some of the regional and provincial chapters:

- (a) EF Mindanao, based in Davao City, with subregional chapters in Butuan, Davao del Norte and Zamboanga;
- (b) EF Panay, based in Iloilo City;
- (c) EF Bicol, based in Iriga City and Sorsogon;
- (d) EF Isabela, based in Ilagan;
- (e) EF Baguio;
- (f) EF Cebu, based in Cebu; and
- (g) EF Metro Manila.

The rapid expansion of EF may be attributed to the following factors:

- (a) The support of school administrators, who were in turn influenced by Vatican II's call for Church responsiveness to "preferential option for the poor".
- (b) The timeliness of EF intervention. EF entered the scene at a time when, as a result of Vatican II, Church-run schools were transforming their thrust toward social orientation. In fact, EF helped in the formulation and operationalization of the mission and vision statements of the schools.
- (c) The spirit of voluntarism. EF's well-trained and highly qualified pool of facilitators travelled all over the country, from the hinterlands of the Cordillera down to the coastal communities of Mindanao, sharing their **skills** and knowledge for free.

Given the same conditions and prerequisites, the EF experience in alternative education can be transferred to other communities and countries. The lessons drawn from it, both positive and negative, should be instructive enough. What is needed is to ensure institutional sustainability in terms of funding. The institution should be able to generate resources, including income, to support its personnel and services in the long run. EF's dependence on external funding agencies contributed to its own peril.

10. OTHER COMMENTS

This paper is subtitled "A Postmortem Appraisal" because of the personal desire of the author to rebuild EF and revive its noble tasks. **As mentioned earlier**, EF **as** an institution may have died but teachers all over the country continue the work that EF has inspired them to do: to be catalysts for social change.

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