Transformational Education towards Integration in a Cohesive Society for Individuals with Special Needs: The Philippine Perspective

Veneriza Nazareno - Trillo
Director, Resource and Program Development
Jesu-Mariae International School, Inc.

INTRODUCTION
The sign of fast – changing globalization affects socioeconomic development of a country. It is Wall Street vs Sesame Street II. Transformational education challenges the process to develop Individual with Special Needs (ISNs) towards integration in a cohesive Philippine society. Impatience never command success. In a highly relational culture such as ours, the key may be to use own social bonds and rouse the emotion of our educators by energizing them, unleashing their creativity and putting their collaborative spirit to work. It enables others to act, model the way and encourage the heart in a shared vision.

A developmentally – appropriate strategy influence behavior and create opportunities for the ISNs to move into a new dimension in an environment filled with unlimited opportunities for discovery. Transformational education is less about personality and more about behaviour of an individual especially those who are differently abled. Behavior such as thinking critically, creating and communicating a vision, and empowering and motivating others can be learned and developed. This implies that transformational education can be developed through role modelling, coaching and counselling, and think – tank experiences.

Beyond training programs and development methods it requires empowering culture and reinforcing of values that will promote participation and engagement in the community.

ECOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Principles of Ecology of Child Development
The principle considers the child as the center. It acknowledges that a child affects as well as affected by the setting in which he spends time. It states that child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment.

**THE PHILIPPINE PERSPECTIVE**

The Philippine Department of Education advocates the right of a child to an education – NO LEARNER LEFT BEHIND.

The Philippine Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education Division geared towards the development of the maximum potential of the child with special needs to enable him to become self-evolving and functional citizen. The ultimate goal of Special Education Division is the integration or mainstreaming of ISNs into the regular school system and eventually into the community. A great deal of thinking and problem-solving to transform Philippines’ basic educational system to a wonderful learning environment has to be done for ISNs.

**EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

The imagination exercises a powerful influence over every act of sense, thought, reason, over every idea. Transformational environment is not where everything matches, shiny and new. It is fast-evolving utilization of available resources that is needed.

A. **Integration / Mainstreaming** – this refers to the enrolment of a ISNs in a regular school with additional teaching and core resources.

B. **Special Classes** - special program provided for ISNs to hone their abilities, skills and talents.

C. **Shadow Teaching** – it is a proactive approach to education by behaviour management intervention, assisting the regular teacher as the need arises and at the same time, keep a close watch on the children and help the child cope up with school’s educational demands.

D. **Team Teaching** – integration with professionals of different skills for full development. It devises a system on how to share responsibility in handling ISNs.

E. **Buddy System** – development of interpersonal relationship. It initiates a sense of belongingness and feeling of security being with others and it strengthens bonding.

F. **Peer Coaching** – assisting peers in developing basic skills through role modelling and interaction.

G. **Life Skills Training** – acquiring general and personal skills through practical and experiential learning.

H. **Co / Extra** – Curricular Activities – mainstreaming of ISNs in all school activities including community immersion.

I. **Values Education** – process of transmitting values of life to ISNs through character formation.

J. **Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Skills** – training ISNs to be self-reliant, self-evolving and responsible. It creates placement opportunities for ISNs.

K. **Alternative Learning System (ALS)** – a second chance program for the marginalized learners who
have been deprived of learning. ALS provides these people with functional literacy through a life skills approach that is equal and parallel to those learned in the four walls of the school.

**RESOURCE CENTERS**

We know that young children learn best by interacting with people, objects and the environment in ways that are meaningful to them.

Practicing “real” inclusion is not merely mixing ISNs to those without disabilities. It requires a paradigm shift in viewing ISNs as no less than the majority of children and accepting their limitations without prejudice.

Integration generally benefit both typically developing children and ISNs in term of setting high expectations for all children, as well as promoting culture of tolerance for individual resources.

Resource centers serve as a place for the development of fine and gross motor skills in an organized pattern guided by signals from the environment. It is an avenue in acquiring social competence, development of individual emotional and practical competence. Resources does not only involve a room for intervention but the holistic environment that is exploratory and experience – based that prepares ISNs to be in a cohesive community. It enables the child to change the world she sees both indoors and out. It is an environment created by the learning that goes on within its spaces and the learners, both child and adult, themselves. It reflects the stories of people who live within it and evolves through sensitivity to the environment. It feels like a studio, with plenty of light, comfortable place to sit and work, well – organized materials, careful display of past projects, natural materials creating inspiration for the future endeavours.

**CONCLUSION**

Lately, we seem to have lost our sense of the common good. We forget that by pursuing the community’s interests we benefit the individuals within it, including ourselves. All these are major contributory factors to the problems that the Philippines and other countries now face. We must now develop a sense of community where people are committed to the welfare of each other. We would do well to remember the moral principle that men, individually, are responsible for what they make of themselves, but, collectively, they are responsible for others in the world in which they live in.

Hopefully, transformational education for Filipino special learners through a comprehensive, innovative, and efficient management and utilization of resources will synergize special service - oriented efforts to finally catapult themselves into functional, self-evolving citizens integrated and effectively mainstreamed into a cohesive society living together in PEACE and HARMONY.
Questions and Answers after Country Report

Q1. Do you have difficulties getting enough support to run the program? Do you have any resistance from parents?
A1. Enlist support from a non-government organization where people have done a training session to support the program. We run parent orientation sessions for parents of regular students.

Q2. Why is the gifted and talented child included into the special needs? Do they have the same needs as children with disabilities?
A2. Gifted and talented children and children with disabilities are all included as one number. Some gifted and talented used to be classified as behaviorally challenged as they were disruptive in class. Teachers need specialized training as well.

Q3. Definition of gifted and talented and other disabilities - are they government endorsed?
A3. Department of Education require testing to access these programs - all are recognized by guidelines of Philippines government.

Q4. Is this quite a common practice to have those sorts of programs in other schools?
A4. These programs are quite common in other schools, too. We focus on building basic skills – functional literacy. These programs are very sustainable.