



Rogelio B. Alarcon, O.P.: Educator and Education Reformist

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Rev. Fr. Rogelio B. Alarcon, O.P., was one of the recipients of the Ten Outstanding Young Men Award in 1972 for his innovative contribution to the system of education in the Philippines. He was the first Prior Provincial of the Dominican Province of the Philippines when the province was formed in 1972. He created and founded an educational system out of his painful experiences from the traditional system of education. Education has to bring back its noble purpose to young people who are in search of learning and not academic discrimination.

Rev. Fr. Alarcon, O.P., formulated an educational system that is learner-centered even before learner-centeredness came out of literature in much recent years. His response to the prevalent problems especially of public school education in the Philippines — that is, a plague the lack of teachers, classrooms, high rate of drop-outs due to poverty, state of life and misery — is the system of non-graded, self-paced, home-study program, modular style of learning. The concept and practice of Re-entry Agenda for the Poor (REAP) an alternative to formal education, an education for all especially the indigents was founded so that the less fortunate and out of school children and youth can hold on to achieving their dreams and wish for a brighter future by finishing their education.

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Introduction

The maxim *Tantum scimus, quantum memoria tenemus* is quite factual, “We know just so much as we remember.” Writing has always been a part of a person in many ways that one can recall expressing herself, her opinion, her knowledge, her research findings and more. Sometimes writing allows one to go back to her memory lane and pushes one even to the dark corners of every library that she is allowed to enter. This article enabled the co-author to fairly remember the days when she was a student in Angelicum School. More so she remembered most fondly was the day, she came back to teach in her alma mater, and relive the “indoctrination” of an innovative educational system she herself express – the non-graded system of education. Coined by a man who by himself was shaped out of his own experiences and grace of God – Rev. Fr. Rogelio Bautista Alarcon, O.P.

The Dominican Friar and Educator

Man’s search for the truth position education within the totality that is constituted by man’s life and experience. Learning today is no longer passive, learners take an active role in the learning process. Many human endeavors are turning toward new directions. The electronic revolution and technological explosion which have threatened to downgrade man’s personality have nonetheless brought within a wholesome reaction. Today, more than ever, man aspires for his freedom and demands respect for his personal dignity. This reaction has come to be a special concern of present-day educators. This together with other educative concerns, like the constant desire to achieve effectiveness in teaching and also the widespread democratization of society and intuitions of learning have all converged towards a movement or a new current in education which has crystallized into a desire to approach learning in a more personalized way (Custodio 1972). This frees the man from the stigma of being regarded as only a part of the significant whole. This kind of education is a picture of man becoming more man. It makes him feel more free, more active, more involved, more responsible, more balanced, more creative, more maturely developed, more self-governed, more apt for prayer and personal relationship with God, and more selfless, enabling one to live in peaceful coexistence with others without being competitive (Ruiz, 1970). The individuality of the person is being addressed well with positive elements thus moving towards an individualized approach to the learning process.

A shift in pedagogy came to revolutionize how a child must be positioned at the center of the learning process. Education includes the *nurture* of the child and, as it grows, its *culture*. The latter is firstly *negative*, consisting of discipline; that is, merely the correcting of faults. Secondly, culture is *positive*, consisting of instruction

and guidance (and thus forming part of education). *Guidance* means directing the pupil in putting into practice what he has been taught. Hence the difference between a private teacher who merely instructs, and a *facilitator* who guides, encourages and directs his pupil to make learning easier. The one trains for school only, the other for life (Kant 1900: 23-24). On July 5, 1972, Angelicum College opened its doors to a unique beginning. The school started without the usual forms and provisions like any other schools operating that time in the Philippines. It was a totally different roller coaster ride. The only objective of the school was to bring about a change of attitude through the evolution of a non-graded system of education.

“How did Father Alarcon do that?” one may ask. The answer is simple. His life story tells us all. Jose Rogelio B. Alarcon was born on October 26, 1937, at Laur, Neuva Ecija, a place very well known as the, “Little town of beautiful people at the foot of Sierra Madre.” Her mother Anatolia Bautista Alarcon was a Registered Pharmacist and his father, Dr. Domingo Alarcon, a medical doctor, were both graduate of the University of Santo Tomas, in Manila. Rogelio or Rod to his friends and family was the second child and the second religious in the family, his sister Milagros entered the Franciscan Missionary of Mary only a year earlier before he was accepted as a postulant in the *Seminario Apostolico Dominicano* in San Juan part of Metro Manila.

As a child he recalls that life in Laur was simple and yet difficult, even if his mother was operating their pharmacy business and his father was the only serving doctor in their town. Oftentimes his father’s services would be given free or sometimes payment for him would come as a basket of fruits, chicken, vegetable and other goods from the farm. In his younger years, he recalled many places where they lived but unfortunately cannot remember anyone in his childhood. To augment family expenses, his father even went into buy and sell of *palay* and rice in Cabanatuan, and later applied as a military reservist in the army. His father’s call for duty brought the family to live in Mizamiz Oriental, Mindanao and not until the World War II broke out in 1942 that they have to transfer again to another place in Capaz, Tarlac. A year after, they had to find another place in Gagalangin, Manila. While in Manila the young Rogelio started schooling at age 6 at Lakandula Elementary School. When he reached Grade 2, he was transferred to Sta. Catalina College in Legarda and was again transferred to St. Theresa’s College the following year. When the war ended, his father went back to military service and was assigned in Baguio. He was able to complete his fourth and fifth year at St. Louis University. Among the many places they lived, Baguio was his favorite. A place he truly loved and cherished most with its cosmopolitan outlook but has maintained its peaceful atmosphere like any other province he has been to have. He finds the weather enchanting for a contemplative mind and the faces of his classmates and neighbors friendly and pleasant. His stay in Baguio was cut short for the family again would be relocated back to Manila since

his father got an assignment at a US Army Medical School. He found a new school for his sixth grader – Colegio de San Juan de Letran, an elite, Catholic, all-male, Dominican school in the historic walled city of Intramuros. He was not able to adapt quite well to his new school environment of young and rich boys. He felt he did not belong and was shy because of his provincial background and accent. It was a disaster he recalls, and his performance in school was not getting any better that year. Coping with his new environment, teachers, classmates and lessons in class were hard and no one in school was making it easy for him. He did not make it in his first attempt to graduate from elementary (Torreliza 2006). Fearful as he was because of the stigma he would acquire, he still managed to finish elementary and high school at the same educational institution. Only to find out later in his life that he would be back in Letran as a School Principal.

This traumatic event as he recalls it, in the life of Father Alarcon paved the way for his creative mind to bring forth an innovation that would make a difference in history. He just found his way to becoming the catalyst of a positive change to reform the traditional system of education in the Philippines.

After high school he was harboring the idea of applying for the Philippine Military Academy in Baguio but landed in an engineering course at the De La Salle University, Manila only because he was influenced by his peers. Like his father, he found himself wearing military naval uniform as one of the cadets of De La Salle University. In one of his assignments, he was fortunate to participate in one of the masses to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception to assist a priest during communion time. He was overwhelmed by the influx of so many people wanting to receive communion and asking for God's presence in their lives. This event led him to something he himself never dreamt of would change his life forever. That same day, when he returned home, the joy in his heart was still very fresh in his memory and so he told his mother without hesitation that Rogelio his son, wanted to become a priest.

He never saw himself becoming a priest and to claim that his participation in the Marian year was God's way of telling him to be His disciple but rather an epiphany.

He entered the Dominican formation house in San Juan and chose to leave the country on July 12, 1956 for the next stage of his religious formation at the St. Albert Priory on Rosaryhill, Hong Kong as a young Dominican novice. He joined the Order of Preachers inspite of the invitation of some monks. He said that "I do not read that Christ was a black monk or a white monk, but that he was a humble preacher" (Torreliza 2006).

He associated Hong Kong to Baguio City. He described it as being hilly, with winding roads and the pleasant seasons very much near to the experience he had while living in Baguio. The priory was strategically chosen to be located in Hong Kong since it offers many opportunities to spread Catholic faith among the people of China and tourists from different countries frequently visiting Hong Kong for leisure and business opportunities. But this place made Father Alarcon less frequently visited by his parents, unlike when he was still in San Juan where his mother and younger brother would attend mass and catch up with one another over her famous sweets and other delicacies, some of which were shared to his fellow seminarians.

Three years of his formation were spent in the St. Albert Priory mostly devoted to studying, praying and letter-writing to his mother as a source of comfort and antidote to homesickness. He was only 19 then and very much a young boy at heart. His mother Anatolia would come for a visit: He would always request from his formation house superior a day to spend exploring and shopping around Hong Kong's bargain stores, nooks and crannies.

Father Alarcon was vested with the Dominican habit on July 28, 1956. In 1959, he returned to Manila to study Theology in the University of Santo Tomas, the same school where his parents graduated from. He made solemn profession to the Order of Preachers on July 29, 1957, and was ordained to the priesthood on May 31, 1964, by Bishop Juan Bautista Velasco, O.P., at the Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City. With his parents and siblings in attendance, he faced his destiny and his long journey as an ordained priest had begun (Seño, OP 2014).

As a Dominican priest, his superior sent him to different assignments. His first duty brought him back to Colegio de San Juan de Letran to become the Assistant Principal to the school's Grade School Department. A year later the Father Rector of the same institution appointed him as the new Principal for the High School Department. The new appointment gave him moments to ponder how he would be able to administer a student body whose reputation was known for being unruly and rowdy, but his goal was strong and defined; in his mind he wanted that his office would make a difference.

Countless issues and myriad problems confronted him while serving his office as principal. Guided by his principle of intelligent compassion and just leadership, he managed to handle all challenges well. He was successful in adhering to the school's goals and mission and maintained a healthy and balanced relationship with his administrators, faculty, staff and student body. It was during his time that the high school department accepted female tutors to address some of its discipline

problems. He knew that students would have a different reaction toward female tutors since students often become treated like children of their own, and in so doing the presence of male and female in the school vicinity managed to neutralize the playful and brusque actions of the boys. As an administrator he also had to follow orders from his Father Rector, until one interference came upon his recommendation to terminate a teacher for a case that a committee was able to endorse to his office. Father Alarcon, not completely convinced with the outcome of the final administrative decision, he resigned from his position as principal two years after his first appointment. Deep in his heart he knew that there was still something that can be done to identify where the failures and behavior of students were coming from. His personal experience in Letran both as a student and an administrator left him wandering about the system of measuring the learning of the students and the educational system in general.

Another appointment in an academic institution came and soon he found himself serving Aquinas University in Legazpi City, first as a theology professor, then he assumed several positions in his entire stay. He was appointed as the Director of the Grade School and High School Departments and later became the Assistant to the Rector for Academic Affairs. Like in his previous academic missions, he instilled changes to keep the university abreast with changes and innovations demanded in the academic world. Father Alarcon continued his services and brought significant contributions in the field of education. He also became the Assistant Priest of the Parish of the Holy Cross, San Juan, School Director of Aquinas School in San Juan, a guidance counselor of the Dominican College, the Prior of the Holy Cross Priory, a counselor of the Regional Vicariate of the Philippines, Director of the Third Order of Preachers, Prior of Santo Domingo Priory (Torreliza 2006). A significant decree of the Dominican Order on December 8, 1971, elected him to the position as the first Filipino Prior Provincial installed immediately after the founding of the Dominican Province of the Philippines on that same year. It was during his tenure as Father Provincial that allowed him to materialize a vision of a school that would cater to the individual needs of each student and discard the traditional concept of grading.

Father Alarcon explored the system without grades by making comparative studies on the different systems of education while enrolled as a masters student at the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School. He brought his idea of an educational system where there will be no grades and failures to many educational institutions, and many found it to be different and temporary. Most educators he met were skeptic on the idea.

He founded the first Angelicum School on July 5, 1972, offering the non-graded system of education. The school was named after the historical site known simply as the Angelicum in Rome, which is located in the precise geographical

center of the city and dates back to 1569. Along with the annexed Convent and Baroque Church of Saints Dominic and Sixtus, the property is also home to the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the Vatican's most important and prestigious places of learning for intellectuals in the Catholic world under the auspices of the Dominican Order. Father Alarcon's vision was made into reality and he himself became its first School Director.

Running this newfound school placed Father Alarcon in the limelight. Many were curious while some were reluctant to accept the system. He presented in his book, *The Angelicum Experience* (1974) the striking features of the school as a non-graded system of learning.

The following are Angelicum's core principles:

1. The school will not use a graded structure. Grades 1, 2, 3, etc., will be done away with. Instead, there will be levels of learning. The difference here will be in the time limit. While a grade refers to a set of skills programmed for learning within a span of time, level refers to the same set of skills to be acquired without time limit. As a student complete one level of work, he goes right on to the next, regardless of the time of the year.
2. There will be no marking system. The usual 75's, A's or other rating system indicating if achievement is satisfactory, failing or is considered without credit, will not be used.
3. Positive motion will be the rule. Scolding, ridicule, embarrassment and punishment in any form will not be considered as disciplinary measures.
4. It will be important for the teachers to know their students well because teaching will be done at the child's individual pace and level.
5. Teachers will be free to do what they think is best for the child. There will be no checking, no supervising. The school will rely mainly on the teachers' sense of responsibility although when inevitable, they will be free to approach the administrators.

The founder was consistent and persistent about its intention. On its infancy stage as a school it accepted 315 boys with whom the school and its system catered to enjoying a diverse pool of learners each having its own experiences, family orientation and culture. Needless to say, the enrollment grew and educators all over the country started to become curious about the system he had offered in Angelicum. He was laughing to himself, since people were already listening to him and educators are asking so many questions for the record. Like all schools, Angelicum aims to attain

academic excellence, refinement of the spirit paved the way to improve the system and offered better alternatives to cater to each individual student, and do what is best for the learner.

His first term as the Father Provincial proved to be fruitful. The Dominicans approved his leadership and accomplishments that he has to stay in office for another four-year term as prior provincial of the Dominican Province of the Philippines. In his term of office he was able to accomplish the following: the founding of Angelicum School in Quezon City; the putting up of two more campuses in Tehran, Iran in 1974 and in Tabuc Suba, Jaro, Iloilo in 1978; and was acknowledged by the Jaycees Club in recognition of his pioneering work in the field of education as one of the recipients of the prestigious award, the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines (TOYM) in 1972.

The Angelicum Experience: A Precursor to Learner-Centered Principles and Practices

The book *The Angelicum Experience* (1974) which was authored by the founder of the school himself – Rev. Fr. Rogelio Alarcon, OP serves as the repository of the basic principles that guide the non-traditional system of the school that are closely associated with the principles and practices of learner-centered education, as found in many contemporary literature only for the past twenty years. Any attempt to unveil the idea of the educator without reading closely the book will be an incomplete project. It is for this purpose that the *The Angelicum Experience* contents are being the object of focus of this section. The book answers the question why the school functioned the way it functions today since the time of its inception. What are their influences from principles to practice on other learning institution and how relevant are they to the present principles of teaching and learning practices from the small classroom to the reform of school systems.

The School's Principles based from Psychology

One can observe upon reading the book, that the author was articulate about the principles to live by as a non-graded school and non-traditional in its system, discussing the operation of the school from its methodology, discipline, assessment, the role of facilitators and parents and many more as it will be seen later. But there is not much articulation on the literature being cited as the basis of one's philosophy of teaching and learning except for two authors, who have significantly influenced contemporary principles of schooling based from their research and practice in psychology. They are Carl Rogers and William Glasser.

Carl Rogers (1902-1987) was a psychologist who can be considered as an education theorist contributing to the expansion of the role of psychology to learning. Much recognition was given to Carl Rogers on his contribution on psychotherapy and clinical psychology as acknowledged by the American Psychological Association (APA). C. Rogers' ground-breaking work started with his practice in psychology called "non-directive therapy" which later on called "non-directive" and eventually called as "client-centered" and sooner "person-centered." Much of the development of this thought and practice in psychology were written in his book *Client-Centered Therapy* published in 1951. Even before the publication of his book in 1951, Rogers already believed that the principles he is practicing in psychology can be applied in a variety of contexts and not just in therapy situation. And that is what he exactly did. He applied his principles in psychology into the context of teaching-learning process. He came out with his book *Freedom to Learn* in 1969. Much of the content of this book were the practices of his approaches to education contained already in his book *Client-Centered Therapy* (1951).

The basic principles of the teaching-learning process in his book are the following:

1. A person cannot teach another person directly; a person can only facilitate another's learning (Rogers 1951). There is the belief that what the student does is more important than what the teacher does.
2. A person learns significantly on those that are perceived as being involved in the maintenance of or enhancement of the structure of the self. Relevancy to the student is essential for learning. The students' experiences become the core of the course.
3. Experience which, if assimilated, would involve change in the organization of self, tends to be resisted through denial or distortion of symbolism. If the content or presentation of a course is inconsistent with preconceived information, the student will learn if he or she is open to varying concepts. Being open to consider concepts that vary from one's own is vital to learning. Therefore, gently encouraging open-mindedness is helpful in engaging the student in learning. It is important, for this reason, that new information be relevant and related to existing experience.
4. The structure and organization of self appears to become more rigid under threats and to relax its boundaries when completely free from threat. If students believe that concepts are being forced upon them, they might become uncomfortable and fearful. A classroom tone of support helps

to alleviate fears and encourages students to have the courage to explore concepts and beliefs that vary from those they bring to the classroom.

5. The educational situation which most affectively promotes significant learning is one in which (a) threat to the self of the learner is reduced to a minimum and (b) differentiated perception of the field is facilitated. The instructor should be open to learning from the students and also working to connect the students to the subject matter. Frequent interaction with the students will help achieve this goal. The instructor's acceptance of being a mentor who guides rather than the expert who tells is instrumental to student-centered, non-threatening, and unforced learning.

Rogers principles on applying psychology to teaching and learning find their apex as groundbreaking works in education in the collected works that came about through his partnership with Harold Lyon before his death in 1987. The work was completed by Lyon and Reinhard Tausch and published in 2013 which was entitled *On becoming an Effective Teacher – Person-Centered Teaching, Psychology, Philosophy, and Dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon*.

William Glasser (1995-2013) was a medical doctor at the same time a psychiatrist and education theorist. Most of his publications highlight his principle that mental health is mostly a matter of personal choice, a precept that found a vast popular audience and influenced teachers, drug counselors and personal therapists. Much of those ideas are written in his popular book *Reality Therapy* published in 1965. The sequel of that book is considered the application of his psychiatric practice as applied to the education process entitled *Schools Without Failure* which came out in 1969. His basic belief is that there should be a shift of power from that of analyst to the patient, thus the individual can shape his or her own life rather than be shaped by personal history. The basic tenets of his principles in psychotherapy that has caught the attention of educationists are the following: a.) the only person one controls in the world is oneself; b.) the effort to change others is doomed and, and worse, is the actual cause of most emotional problems; c.) the most profound human need is "to love and be loved." Relating these basic principles to education according to W. Glasser, teachers should abandon coercive methods like class ranking and punitive grading. Caring relationship changes the atmosphere of learning by letting students assume responsibility for their own behavior and academic performance. Giving of grade is not essential to learning especially when lessons connect to the students' everyday experiences, an impossibility for grades to measure. Thus, it makes nonsense to fail a child because there is no reason for it. "Once children start failing, they begin to believe that they cannot do anything. They give up," asserts Dr. Glasser. His work

did not pass without critics like how could a child assume so much responsibility for himself and the like. But he insisted that based on studies, his methods simply worked.

The Non-Graded School and Learner-Centered Education

What is interesting in pursuing a closer look on the foundational principles of the book *The Angelicum Experience* is the fact that much of the literature on learner-centeredness began to appear only in the middle of the 1990s whereas the practices of Angelicum, that reflect learner-centeredness, already began as early 1970s. It is implied that the school is ahead of its time.

Angelicum had realized that the way of learning have to change not only because of the coming twenty-first-century context, but more so, because of the contribution of sciences on psychology, *neuro-science*, sociology and the like that contributes to the understanding of the life of a student. Teaching and learning in the twenty-first century has become a dynamic, complex and interactive academic activity. Less and less institutional standardization is being given importance. Thus, the students, their teachers and administrators begin to have compelling reasons to be the authority making appropriate instructional decisions for themselves. The shift of authority includes, the move from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness. One of the many roles of the teacher has to shift — from being sage on the stage to becoming guide on the side. Truly twenty-first-century learning has to depart from many practices from the past that do not render much meaningful contribution to a modern learner equipped with technology, has an easy access to information, and imbued with much freedom and self-determination to learn.

This section would try to articulate Angelicum's principles and practices under the main theme of the principles and practices of a learner-centered school, which gained some attention at much later period. The authors on learner-centeredness whose works are considered with high regard in the field of education are the partnership of Barbara McCombs and Jo Sue Whisler and that of Maryellen Weimer.

Barbara McCombs and Jo Sue Whisler's foundational learner-centered book entitled *The Learner-Centered Classroom and School: Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation and Achievement* published in 1997 was based from their collaborative work with a special task force established by the American Psychological Association (APA) that was commissioned for the purpose of reforming and redesigning education by coming up with form and framework that could serve as general principles. The

original document from which the articulation of the domains of Learner-Centered principles was entitled *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles: Guidelines for School Redesign and Reform*.

On the other hand, the book of Maryellen Weimer whose first edition came out in 2002 entitled, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* contains the original thoughts of the author on learner centeredness in teaching, which she followed up with the second edition in 2013. This time, M. Weimer has contextualized learner-centered teaching in its expanded use, like its role in school curriculum, classroom set-up and learning materials, teaching strategies and wider institutional curricular reforms.

The following are the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles known also as the five domains of learner-centered principles:

1. *Metacognitive and Cognitive Factors*

Principle 1: **The nature of the learning process.** Learning is a natural process of pursuing personally meaningful goal, and it is active volitional and internally mediated; it is a process of discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience, filtered through the learner's unique perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

Learning should become as natural as possible for its objective to be achieved. Imposition of knowledge neither coercion for the child to learn are slowly becoming unsuitable means for any educator to make a moral sense of what he or she is doing as a teacher. Angelicum has realized this early on thus, stipulating it in the Chapter 3 of *The Angelicum Experience* the need to be an open classroom:

Departing from the traditional classroom structure which encloses children arbitrarily from their surroundings while the learning process is going on, Angelicum's open classroom aims to mold children who are able to relate knowledge gained with reality. Children who learn about people and things in books but are isolated from actual interaction finish school knowing everything about "book learned" characters and things without recognizing these in their surroundings. This is basic alienation which the open classroom proposes to break through.

By being an open classroom, the school provides a natural setting of learning. Link between what is read on books and how students relate them to their real life surroundings become second nature to them. The smooth meaning-making process in the mind of the student occurs based from the student's information and experiences in reality. According to Drapikowski, as cited in Thanasoulas (2000), if a

student is able to perform in a problem-solving situation, meaningful learning should then occur because he has constructed an interpretation of how things work using pre-existing structures. It is in this case that previous and existing knowledge and experiences are tools ready for the learner's disposal to solve problems that are not far from his practical and real life situation (Brooks and Brooks, 1993).

One can tell when learning becomes more of a burden than pleasure. It is a point when learning is not anymore fun because it does not proceed from the fountain of naturality but superficiality of things. To relate to this concretely, *The Angelicum Experience* mention this in Chapter 9 on the role of parents:

If a child goes on laboring with his school work at home under the pressure of his parents who spontaneously take on the role of a teacher, he will gradually begin to associate learning with displeasure.

When he watches television, plays scrabble or chess or tinkers with a toy car, it does not mean he stops learning. Angelicum's open learning system encompasses what a child learns in ways other than schooling.

Meaningful goals set by the student learning and the act of learning itself as volitional, are at the heart of the naturality of learning. The emphasis on freedom for genuine learning to occur cannot be emphasized more. Thus the direction of the center of the act of learning is on the student learning and not on the teacher teaching. In the chapter 8 of *The Angelicum Experience* this has become clear when it said:

The emphasis of a non-graded system is upon learning rather than teaching. A teacher's primary concern is to teach the children how to learn rather than what to learn. The teacher has to fulfill her role of molding the children to become continuing learners.

Freedom to learn does not only support that learning should be as natural as possible but also provides the learner to go deep into the metacognitive dimension of learning itself when it says "being taught how to learn than what to learn."

Principle 2: Goals of the learning process. The learner seeks to create meaningful, coherent representations of knowledge regardless of the quantity and quality of data available.

Mental models serve as frameworks to assist the mind towards understanding. No thinking process exists in a vacuum. One always has a coherent representation of something as an objective, for it to be processed by the mind in the activity of learning, be it a prejudice, bias, previous thinking or learning (Johnson-Laird, 1983). Humans can understand intelligible concepts through this principle no matter how complex or numerous the tasks of learning as long as it is within the range of the learner's mental

models to be understood in a coherent way. *The Angelicum Experience* expands that process as regards the importance of open classroom by saying:

The child then sees the school as stimulant and soon discovers things, people, situations, alongside concepts, ideas, numbers and figures by himself. And because he learns most of them in a climate of openness, that is, he has not been limited with a set of skills and concepts only, but has been introduced to so many other things related to what he is being taught on hand, his view of the world takes on a unified perspective.

Howard Gardner (1999) supports the idea by putting it in the context of a constructivist classroom aiming at a coherent relationships of topics represented by a big idea when he mentioned that, “[I]n constructivist classroom, the curriculum is generally a process of digging deeper and deeper into big ideas, rather than presenting a breath of coverage. And as students pursue questions, they derive new and more complex questions to be investigated. Building useful knowledge structures requires effortful and purposeful activity over an extended period.” As learners struggle to make meaning, they undertake progressive structural shifts in perspective, in a sense, “big ideas.” These learner-constructed, central organizing ideas can be generalized across experiences, and they often require undoing or reorganizing earlier conceptions. This, process continues throughout development (Fosnot 1996).

Thus, the teacher who serves as a facilitator of learning should be mindful of the learners’ building-up of knowledge and refrain from presenting multitude of concepts and facts that are devoid of coherence and could impede the learners’ progressive mental scheming that could lead to confusion and irrelevance (Brooks and Brooks, 1993; Thanasoulas, 2000).

Principle 3: The construction of knowledge. The learner links new information with existing and future-oriented knowledge in uniquely meaningful ways.

In promoting an open classroom, *The Angelicum Experience* states that:

In an open classroom, learning happens in an ideal continuous stream. The child learns to relate knowledge, ideas, and concepts with reality and to use skills he has learned as tools for further discovery.

Brooks and Brooks (1993) concur that, placing it in the constructivist context, the role of the teacher in a classroom is to organize information around big ideas that engage the students’ interest, to assist students in developing new insights, and to connect them with their previous learning. It is in this way that, constructivism which serves as the primary philosophical grounding of learner-centeredness, calls for the elimination of a standardized curriculum. Instead, it promotes using

curricula that are customized to the students' prior knowledge. (Brooks and Brooks; Thanasoulas, 2000).

McCombs and Whisler (1997), in the presentation of their five premises of the learner-centered model, that pertains to the construction of knowledge, their foundational premise is that: Learning is constructive process that occurs best when what is being learned is relevant and meaningful to the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in creating his or her own knowledge and understanding by connecting what is being learned with prior knowledge and experience.

Principle 4: **Higher-order thinking.** Higher-order strategies for “thinking about thinking” – for overseeing and monitoring mental operations – facilitate creative and critical thinking and the development of expertise.

It is important to consider that part of nurturing and accepting the uniqueness of students, is for teachers not to attempt to transfer conceptual knowledge to students through words; instead, they should be concerned with how learners understand the process of knowing and how they justify their beliefs (Glaserfeld 1995; Richardson 2003). Cognitive exercises, tests thru cases, applications of theories and evaluation, reflections on issues and opinions, problem solving and the likes exhibit student's response to higher order thinking and the enhancement of the skills needed in this area. For example, the importance of problem solving in the context of constructivism, is at the heart of learning, thinking and development. As people solve problems and discover the consequences of their actions and by reflecting on their past and immediate experiences – they construct their own understanding.

Developing thinking about thinking and foster creative and critical thinking, learners are given more latitude in becoming effective problem solvers. They are exposed to identifying and evaluating problems, as well as deciphering ways in which to transfer their learning to these problems (Thanasoulas 2000). If a student is able to perform in a problem-solving situation, meaningful learning should then occur because he has constructed an interpretation of how things work using pre-existing structures (Drapikowski cited in Thanasoulas 2000).

Weimer (2002), in one of her five key changes to practice in a learner-centered teaching is that: ***Learner-centered teaching encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it:***

Learner-centered teachers talk about learning. In casual conversations, they ask students what they are learning. In class they may talk about their own learning. They challenge student assumptions about learning and encourage them to accept responsibility for decisions they make about

learning; like how they study for exams, when they do assigned reading, whether they revise their writing or check their answers. Learner-centered teachers include assignment components in which students reflect, analyze and critique what they are learning and how they are learning it. The goal is to make students aware of themselves as learners and to make learning skills something students want to develop.

2. *Affective factors*

Principle 5: **Motivational influences on learning.** The depth and breadth of information processed, and what and how much is learned and remembered, are influenced by a.) self-awareness and beliefs about personal control, competence and ability; b.) clarity and saliency of personal values, interests, and goals; c.) personal expectations for success or failure; d.) affect, emotion, and general states of mind; and e.) the resulting motivation to learn.

The different areas in one's background bring different colors to the understanding of the person, especially when employing the five dimensions mentioned above. And it is quite obvious since there are no two children that are the same, then there are no two experiences, two understandings, and two conclusions on the matter that are exactly the same for each child. Just as there are no the same level of applications on two children about the five dimensions stated above. Thus, the teacher has to give center of attention to each child according to his need, which may not be present in others. *The Angelicum Experience* gives emphasis on this through its belief in the benefits of being an open classroom by saying:

The open classroom is thus child centered. It has to, because unless it becomes so, it fails. It must first consider the uniqueness of each child in the class, then be structured to fit his individual, physical, psychological and social needs.

It is highly recommended that in a learner-centered classroom, the focus is not really much on the teacher teaching but on the learner learning. The teacher assumes some other roles essentially important to the need of the child. These are roles that the teacher has to take seriously in order to address the other areas of the child affecting his or her learning, as *The Angelicum Experience* states:

The complexity of the learning process being totally recognized at Angelicum has made the teacher more acutely aware of her multi-faceted role. The school Angelicum proposes to maintain encompasses fulfillment of the intellectual, psychological and emotional needs of a child.

Thus, being a teacher at Angelicum one has to be aware of the shifting of roles that one has to take whether that role is laden with political or philosophical bias or

not, it is still what defines a learner-centered teaching and learning (Massouleh, N. and Jooneghani R. 2012). *The Angelicum Experience* gives emphasis on this when it says:

At Angelicum, a teacher must necessarily shift from her role as traditional giver of information to that of a resource person, a guide and a facilitator of learning.

One of the five premises of McCombs and Whisler (1997) about the learner-centered model on the affective or motivational influences to learning states that: Learners' unique differences include their emotional states of mind, learning rates, learning styles, stages of development, abilities, talents, feelings of efficacy, and other academic and nonacademic attributes and needs. These must be taken into account if all learners are to be provided with the necessary challenges and opportunities for learning and self-development.

Principle 6: Intrinsic motivation to learn. Individuals are naturally curious and enjoy learning, but intense negative cognitions and emotions (e.g., feeling insecure worrying about failure, being self-conscious or shy, and fearing corporal punishment, ridicule, or stigmatizing labels) thwart this enthusiasm.

The optimal process of learning takes place in a positive environment supported by smooth interpersonal relationship wherever the locus of learning may take place, either inside the campus, at home or in any agreed location. *The Angelicum Experience* states that:

Positive motivation will be the rule. scolding, ridicule, embarrassment and punishment in any form will not be considered as disciplinary measure.

The concern of the teacher is not about being a fault-finder but instead, she focuses on the child as he is, as *The Angelicum Experience* would say that:

The student at Angelicum is accepted for what he is capable of and recognized for what he can do best. He is made to feel that what he learns matters more than the judgment of someone who is supposed to measure the extent of his understanding of things.

If one follows the thought of the statement above and put it in the context of examinations being given to students, the Chapter 5 of *The Angelicum Experience* would elaborate thru an example by saying:

At the school when an examination is given, it is not an occasion for awarding grades, rather it is a way of finding out what the child has not learned too well and which are the areas he/she should concentrate more.

The Angelicum Experience finds whole problem of intrinsic motivation as embedded in the whole system of traditional schooling particularly related to the practice of grading which has become an essential pillar of schooling. The problem with emphasis on grades quoting Glasser (1969) is that it is exaggerated that the problem of failure, has become a major one in schools. Too many children who attend school are failing. Often the failure is not real but those who experience the threat usually resent or fear school and begin to have poor self-image which eventually turns them to actual failures or problem children. The child who fails also disappoints his parents who are pressured by society's expectations. The child grows up seeing himself as incompetent and inadequate.

Glasser explains the issue of internal motivation further as found in his classic book *Schools without Failure* by saying that the role of positive motivation must come into vital play. Regardless of his background, culture, and economic level, a person will not succeed in general unless he can in some way experience success in one important part of his life. A child, no matter what his background is, if he experiences success in school will have more chances to succeed in life.

It has always been the conviction of Angelicum as found in the Chapter 5 of *The Angelicum Experience* that meaningful learning is borne out of intrinsic motivation and all the factors that support it. Grading or marking system is not one of them since they have become a hindrance to the natural proclivity of the child to be inspired and have fun during learning and at the same time not be judged for weakness or deficiencies:

In our society which has been so conditioned with the idea of grade achievement, it has been forgotten that a child is not really impressed with marks unless their meanings are emphasized. The child is more essentially spellbound with knowledge and ideas and still awed with discovery and thrilled with mastery.

McCombs and Whisler (1997) support this thought as seen in one of the five premises about the learner-centered model on the issue of affective factors/ intrinsic motivation to learn: Learning is a fundamentally natural process; learners are naturally curious and basically interested in learning about and mastering their world. Although negative thoughts and feelings sometime interfere with this natural inclination and must be dealt with, the learner does not require "fixing."

Principle 7: Characteristics of motivation-enhancing learning tasks. Curiosity, creativity, and higher-order thinking are stimulated by relevant, authentic learning tasks of optimal difficulty and novelty for each student.

The teacher being facilitator of learning has her hands full in order to make sure that learning for children becomes meaningful and address the wide range of learning dimensions of an active student. The facilitator of learning should not run out of devices, strategies, even tricks to provide optimal learning. As stated in *The Angelicum Experience*:

Teachers are free to do what they think is best for the child.

Such freedom is given to teachers as facilitators of learning in order that they address too what *The Angelicum Experience* discovers in each child learning as discussed in Chapter 2:

The learning gaps which occur in a regimented system are thus filled in. It becomes easier to encourage individual progress and because lessons are given within a child's capacities, it is likely that he accomplishes them with a deep feeling of satisfaction for his success which in turn encourages him to move on.

Freedom given to teachers to give what is best for the child makes more sense if truly the child is at the center of the attention of the teacher and all her effort gravitate towards sustaining the level of interest of each child in actual learning scenario. This is supported by *The Angelicum Experience* principle on the emphasis of having open school system when it says:

The development in Angelicum's open school system has tapped teachers' sensitiveness to children's interest level and has set an almost precise attunement to the things that catch the children's attention.

No teacher can be at par with a facilitator of learning in a learner-centered school who is flexible, creative, filled with ingenuity, resourceful matched with the virtue of patience, hard work and with a lot of common sense. All the skills and knowledge she possesses and continues to enhance for herself and with her co-facilitators are directed towards the best interest of her student. The principles contained in *The Angelicum Experience* especially in Chapter 8 has already given emphasis on these traits which serve as the *raison d'être* of any facilitator of learning:

In the non-graded system, it is the responsibility of the teacher to be flexible. Her own mode of learning must keep in parallel with the children's unflogging interest in things. She has to be attentive to the novel experiences. She has to develop a wide interest herself. For the effectivity of learning in the school's set up depends on her involvement, responsibility and ingenuity in handling the substance and form of education placed totally at her own disposal.

In bringing about the instructional and learning environment, she is expected to be creative, making of the assigned to her a stimulating experience for the children.

To sustain the learning mode, she must likewise, form attitudes vital to continuous learning such as self-reliance and independence. She brings this about by the many integrated activities which she organizes, and picks up from what the children themselves show and express.

The first of the five key changes to practice in a learner-centered teaching according to Weimer (2002): ***Learner-centered teaching engages students in the hard, messy work of learning:***

I believe teachers are doing too many learning tasks for students. We ask the questions, we call on students, we add detail to their answers. We offer the examples. We organize the content. We do the preview and the review. On any given day, in most classes teachers are working much harder than students. I'm not suggesting we never do these tasks, but I don't think students develop sophisticated learning skills without the chance to practice and in most classrooms the teacher gets far more practice than the students.

3. *Developmental factors*

Principle 8: Developmental constraints and opportunities. Individuals progress through stages of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development that are a function of unique genetic and environmental factors.

The growth area of each child, be it academic, emotional, psychological, physical and social growth should be nurtured as natural as possible. A learner-centered classroom puts this as number one in the list of priorities in the development of the child. It is one's role to eradicate factors that could obstruct such a natural process. *The Angelicum Experience* recognizing itself as *a child – centered program* is mindful of this reality by saying:

The school proceeded from the basic idea of allowing each child's individual growth to happen in its natural pace by removing the barriers that stunt it. The school is formed out of the uniqueness of each child in the school.

However, one should not only be mindful of the importance of the growth areas of each child and the dangerous factors that could stunt them but also the important recognition of the absence of non-uniformity in growth and development. Teachers should also be mindful of the peculiarity of the individual paces of the growth and development of each child. In the Chapter 2 of *The Angelicum Experience*, this was mentioned this way:

The process of growth – whether physical, intellectual and emotional – is not constant. It may be rapid at one time, slow in the next. If a child picks up a rapid rate at a certain point in his growth, he is likely to slow down at a certain period.

Neither does a child progress all in one piece. He turns to spurt ahead more rapidly in some areas than in others. He maybe fast in Mathematics but slow in literature.

This school would always mean getting acquainted with the learning pace of each child.

The Angelicum Experience recognizes the serious role of each facilitator of learning, knowing that the complexity of the learning process being totally recognized at Angelicum has made the teacher more acutely aware of her multi-faceted role. The school Angelicum proposes to maintain that encompasses the fulfillment of the intellectual, psychological and emotional needs of a child.

4. *Personal and Social Factors*

Principle 9: **Social and cultural diversity.** Learning is facilitated by social interactions and communication with others in flexible, diverse (in age, culture, family background etc.), and adaptive instructional settings.

Collaboration in a student-centered learning environment is encouraged and methods of alternative assessment are utilized to measure learning. It is thus, important to define and help teachers become more aware of those beliefs and assumptions about learners, learning, and teaching. This is to ensure the consistency of an instructional orientation toward the learner's needs capacities, and perspectives and toward learning as a process of personally constructing meaning (Brooks and Brooks, 1993; McCombs and Whisler, 1997).

The Angelicum Experience, had observed this and made the realization that:

With no structure to limit him, the child moreover finds ease in learning.

In an attempt to have all the access to the possibility of learning in an open scenario and expand all the possibilities of interaction of learning, Angelicum had started accepting girls after its three years of its foundation in 1972. Why the school should not remain to be an exclusive school for boys, *The Angelicum Experience* explains, thus in Chapter 10 as regards the arrival of the girls:

As the system of Angelicum evolved, the need to normalize the environment became more apparent – to starting accepting girl students in the school. If

the idea underlying child's full development were considered, the school's exclusivity for boys afforded merely a one sided experience. The girls balance the atmosphere with their characteristic quietness and gentleness.

Weimer (2002), in one of her five key changes to practice in a learner-centered teaching, laid the importance of a ***Learner-centered teaching that encourages collaboration:***

It sees classrooms (online or face-to-face) as communities of learners. Learner-centered teachers recognize, and research consistently confirms, that students can learn from and with each other. Certainly the teacher has the expertise and an obligation to share it, but teachers can learn from students as well. Learner-centered teachers work to develop structures that promote shared commitments to learning. They see learning individually and collectively as the most important goal of any educational experience.

Principle 10: Social acceptance, self-esteem, and learning. Learning and self-esteem are heightened when individuals are in respectful and caring relationships with others who see their potential, genuinely appreciate their unique talents, and accept them as individuals.

The principle of learner-centered practice stated above is captured as one of the main tenets of Angelicum. As *The Angelicum Experience* in its Chapter 6 states:

Emphasis not on competition is the attitude of Angelicum. The sense of camaraderie which is unqualified among children is enhanced. Providing the leit-motif is sharing and working together. Activities such as games, singing sessions, drama presentations and literary programs are undertaken as a means of expression rather than an occasion to win a prize.

McCombs and Whisler (2007) support this claim and explain it clearly in one of their five premises of the learner-centered model on the area of personal/social factors and social acceptance that says: Learning occurs best in a positive environment, one that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, that contains comfort and order, and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated.

5. *Individual differences*

Principle 11: Individual differences in learning. Although basic principles in learning, motivation, and effective instruction apply to all learners (regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, physical ability, religion or socioeconomic status), learners have different capabilities and preference for learning mode and strategies. These differences are function of environment.

One of the main principles that learner-centeredness truly revere is the inherent human design, that each student is unique. No two persons are the same, from there follows their capacities, talents, traits, personalities, and that include their learning pace and style. *The Angelicum Experience* states:

Anyone who recognizes individuality knows that every classroom is made up of children who differ to such an extreme degree that they cannot possibly be considered matched. It is this uniqueness that Angelicum recognizes in every child. He is therefore made to feel that no one can equal or best him in anything he does because everyone has his own way of doing things.

If each learner is unique, then the facilitator should acknowledge the fact that each of her students has his own pace in learning, and therefore should be guided and given attention on that basis. Thus, the facilitator is reminded of one of the important instructions on this issue:

The instructions given to the teachers: It will be important for the teachers to know their students well because teaching will be done at the child's individual pace and level...

This appropriateness of individual treatment for each student is very much part of the constructivist practice. Each child is a unique person with distinct pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning, style, and family background. Both the curriculum and adults' interaction with children should be responsive to individual differences (Bredenkamp 1987; Brooks and Brooks 1993). This is part of human nature that educators should learn to accept – no two learners are exactly the same in more ways than one.

Thus, for instructional purposes, children must be viewed as unique individuals with different patterns of growth and learning abilities. Unfortunately, our present system of education still attempts to lock all students into inflexible learning environments (Gutierrez and Slavin 1992; Bredenkamp, 1987; von Glasersfeld 1995). Because meaning, knowledge, conceptual structures are constructed differently by each individual, teachers should be cognizant that students may view curricula, textbooks, didactic props, and micro worlds differently than they do (Yilmaz 2008).

However, a possible contention along this line of principle and practice may arise by asking: Is the power-shift in the learning area or classroom moving now towards the students from the teachers? This maybe a valid question, if discussed in the context of power and personal motive and interests in schooling. But maybe, this is reserved for another topic of discussion (Massouleh and Jooneghani 2012).

To respect the uniqueness of each learner and acknowledge the reality that each has his own pace in learning, it is quite unacceptable then, that learners would feel the pressure of being coerced to learn which can easily be conspired by the practices of a traditional classroom. *The Angelicum Experience* sheds light on this by saying:

The absence of rigidity and fixed requirements in the non-graded system allows for a flexible curriculum. This curriculum design incorporates work content based on the child's learning pace.

The school trusts that given the proper encouragement, the right resources and ample span of time for them to develop their own learning pace, the children need not be prodded to learn.

Even the practices of traditional schooling of bringing home assignments or learning tasks do not go unnoticed by the learner-centered principles and practices. The chapter 9 of *The Angelicum Experience*, which reviews the renewed roles of parents, provides a clear picture of how each learner's self-pace attitude in learning at the same time sustaining their interests should be addressed:

Only if he runs short of time is he allowed to bring his assignment home. At home he is supposed to relax from schoolwork and learn in other ways about other things. At home, he should thus be treated like everyone else and be allowed to watch his favorite TV program or listen to music instead of being nagged to study. The child needs all the rest and relaxation he needs at home. In this way, more experiences will widen his learning scope because he tends to absorb more if he is relaxed.

After all, as Murray (2000) would say, "It is no secret that students learn best when they self-regulate their own academic goals, develop strategies to meet them and reflect on their academic performance."

In one of the five premises on the learner-centered model of McCombs and Whisler (1997), they emphasized the recognition about each learner's individual differences. Affirming that each learner is distinct and unique: *Their distinctiveness and uniqueness must be attended to and taken into account if learners are to engage in and take responsibility for their own learning.*

On the other hand, Weimer (2002), in one of her five key changes to practice in a learner-centered teaching opines that, **Learner-centered teaching motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes:**

I believe that teachers make too many of the decisions about learning for students. Teachers decide what students should learn, how they learn it,

the pace at which they learn, the conditions under which they learn and then teachers determine whether students have learned. Students aren't in a position to decide what content should be included in the course or which textbook is best, but when teachers make all the decisions, the motivation to learn decreases and learners become dependent. Learner-centered teachers search out ethically responsible ways to share power with students. They might give students some choice about which assignments they complete. They might make classroom policies something students can discuss. They might let students set assignment deadlines within a given time window. They might ask students to help create assessment criteria.

Principle 12: Cognitive filters. Personal beliefs, thoughts, and understandings resulting from prior learning and interpretations become the individual's basis for constructing reality and interpreting life experiences.

It is important for the teacher then, to recognize and respect students' backgrounds, beliefs, assumptions, and prior knowledge; provide abundant opportunities for group dialogue aimed at fostering shared understanding of the topic under study; establish a learning environment that encourages students to examine, change and even challenge their existing beliefs and understanding through meaningful, stimulating, interesting and relevant instructional tasks (Richardson 2003).

Taking it from the constructivist point of view, one can see that learning environment should encourage thoughtful reflection on the learning experience which is grounded in meaningful and authentic learning tasks (Brooks and Brooks 1993; McCombs and Whisler 1997). Such exercise of being reflective in learning affirms the importance of previous learning that colors to a certain sense the meaning being drawn from one's learning process.

Supporting the importance of the actualization of cognitive filters, McCombs and Whisler (1997) would affirm that learner-centered educators have a perspective that includes knowing the learner in promoting, understanding basic principles defining learners and learning, and therefore, honoring and accepting the learner's point of view.

Practices of learner centeredness as explained through these principles can be seen further through the official academic journal of Angelicum College, *EPIKEIA, the Inter-disciplinary Journal of Alternative Education and Formation*, which is issued annually by Angelicum College, Quezon City.

Re-entry Agenda for the Poor (REAP): An Alternative to Formal Education

It is a known fact that Filipinos have high regard for education. Both the rich and the poor believe that to improve one's life is to immerse oneself in a life-long activity of being educated. The Philippine Education for all 2015 stated that the Philippines is committed to pursue eight time-bound and specific targets which aims to alleviate among others poverty by half in year 2015. There are provisions and plans focused on Education and Youth opportunity. According to,

Article XIV, Sec. 5, paragraph 5 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution education must be given highest priority and therefore the highest budget allocation among government agencies each year as required.

The 1987 Constitution likewise guarantees the right to education of every Filipino. It provided that, "The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make education accessible to all."

The right of every Filipino to quality basic education is further emphasized in Republic Act 9155 or the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001. Along with Republic Act 6655 or the Free Secondary Education Act, these laws reaffirm the policy of the State to protect and promote the rights of all Filipinos by providing children free and compulsory education in the elementary and high school level. This pertains to six years of free tuition fees for children aged 6 to 11, and free four years of secondary schooling for those aged 12 to 15.

Education is a key factor in easing poverty, according to overwhelming evidences that investment in human capital is a solution in reducing poverty (Jorgensen 1996; Permia 1996; Beltran 1998). Not just an answer to poverty but it is also a right for every Filipino to have access to education, however hindrances permit an individual not to enjoy such right (Durban and Catalan 2012). Concerns such as increase rate of drop-outs, poor school facilities, insufficient school supplies, books and teaching materials, lacking infrastructure like building, classrooms to accommodate students, and some schools are used consistently as relocation and temporary shelters for evacuees during calamities and emergencies. These are some of the scenarios that justify the need to resort to alternative learning systems (Bautista, Bautista and Ocampo 2010).

Angelicum College launched in year 1998, another innovation created right after the successful offering of its Home Study Program five years earlier. With the approval of then President Joseph "Erap" Ejercito Estrada at the Angelicum College in Quezon City, launched the program dubbed as the "Educational Re-entry Agenda of the President for the Poor" or E.R.A.P. under one of his programs "Erap Para sa

Mahirap,” complements another non-formal education. This is a move to provide a novel back-to-school program that will allow the poor, young breadwinners, domestic helpers, drop-outs and alike an opportunity to free education at their own pacing and time, thus, one may earn a diploma even if one is home-based or even while working. President Estrada said in his speech during the launch that his administration will aim to formulate policies and implement programs that will give the poor access to quality education as a way of arming them in the fight against poverty. Further the President said that, “We are keenly aware that our people can best enter the battlefield of life with education as their weapon.”

E.R.A.P as its was earlier known by such acronym is now more popularly known as R.E.A.P., which stands for Re-Entry Agenda for the Poor, is a program that will enable poor Filipinos twenty-five years and below to study for free. To help bankroll the pro-poor education program, Estrada, during his short stint in his office as president, awarded two million pesos (Php 2,000,000.00) from the Presidential Social Fund to Angelicum College ERAP Program. The President later announced the appointment of Fr. Alarcon, as consultant of the Presidential Commission on Educational Reforms.

Today even with the change in name from ERAP to REAP since 2000, this program continuously offered the basic education to address the following reasons:

1. Inability to cope with school structure, leading to loss of interest in schooling
2. Inability to afford the cost of education and its ancillary expenses
3. Working to augment family income
4. Looking after younger siblings
5. Sharing the responsibility of housekeeping
6. Lingering or chronic illness, and
7. Physical inability.

There are now twenty REAP learning sites all over the Philippines with more than a thousand students enrolled. The program offers an alternative and flexible learning system that utilizes a formal education curriculum mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd). Learning in this alternative education program, is accomplished by the learner outside the traditional classrooms setting.

Mona Dumlao-Valisno an educator and a former Secretary of Education quoted in in his book, *The Nation's Journey to Greatness*,” some basic statistics of our country's population. According to Department of Education and National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) the population grew from 28.09 million Filipinos in

1961 to 106.87 million in 2012, growing at a rate of 2.04% per annum. Majority of the country's population are between ages 6-15 years old, school-age. Likewise, statistics in school enrolment is also moving in an erratic fashion. In the '60s, predominantly public schools over private schools supplied 95% of the total elementary enrolment, however consistently declined only by 1% percentage point over the next five decades. On the other hand, the secondary level education contributed about 37% in the 1960s. Public high school enrollment increased remarkably in the 80s until today, contributing to about 80% of the total basic education. The consistent trends in the improvement of school enrolment among Filipinos may have been attributed to the growing awareness of the importance of education to one's success and improvement of life.

Angelicum College is taking part in this move towards people empowerment to move them out of illiteracy and poverty. The REAP program *envisioned that the Filipino out-of-school youth and adults to finish at least basic formal education through its Non-graded system of Education and its Home Study Program by mobilization of the different types of institutions to support its implementation.*

Allan Bernardo, editor of "The Paradox of Philippine Education and Education Reform," illustrated the relationship between education and poverty. He was able to display the latest education indicators sourced from NSCB and DepEd and found direct relationship between poverty and education across different regions in the country. It describes that as poverty increases, the drop-out rates also increases but the net enrolment rate and cohort survival rate decreases. Children of school age are not being sent to school due to poverty among many reasons. In a speech delivered by Father Alarcon in 2002 at the First World Union of Catholic Teachers (WUCT) during the Asia Pacific Conference in Bangkok, he quoted Gavin Jones' statement taken from his article entitled, Population Dynamics and Their Impact on Adolescents in the ESCAP Region," Asia Pacific Population Journal.

The quality of education varies greatly between regions and between kinds of primary schools within most countries, with the lowest quality normally in the more isolated and poorest regions of the country. Problems of inadequate training of teachers, absenteeism of teachers, poor quality of building and lack of facilities and teaching aids bedevil such regions. A child is sent barefoot to a school where attendance is spasmodic, the teacher is poorly trained and lacking motivation, and teaching aids are non-existent apart from a cracked blackboard and a few pieces of chalk can hardly be considered to be equipped to compete with his or her city cousins in the competition to advance to higher levels of education.

Reacting positively to this statement, Fr. Alarcon noted in his speech that there have been many great attempts from well-meaning institution and organizations to

educate the young in all corners of the country effectively and efficiently. However, the consistently increasing number of dropouts and out-of-school youth in the country is likewise alarming and therefore requires that we start to reinvent our approaches and methodologies if we are to meet the demands of our time. With his strong belief that quality education can be attained equally well outside the traditional classroom the REAP program offers a reengineered approach to education. It provided accessibility without barriers to those willing to be educated and committed to change themselves and their families to have a better life. The REAP program responds to these challenges and provides the following mission statements:

1. To provide *free* basic formal and Catholic education for out-of-school children, youth and adults
2. To form and develop competent professionals and leaders of the future by educating the out-of-school children, youth and adults with the help of kind-hearted members of the community in the spirit of volunteerism; and
3. To provide a systematic exposure of the community to the context of the poor.

Components and Rationale of the REAP Program:

1. The REAP Partner Communities and Learning Sites

Need for an Innovative Self-Learning and Teacher Independent Type of Knowledge Acquisition

REAP is a Home Study Program (HSP) that provides an alternative and flexible system for the poor but offers the same formal education curriculum like any other school or educational institution in the Philippines. It answers to certain educational needs of the youth since self-learning and teacher independent type of knowledge acquisition happens outside the traditional school structure. Learning takes place independently and at the convenience of the learner both in time and in place. REAP learning sites is a designated learning and resource center by the partner community. It is a place for learners and the volunteers tutors to meet, and a place that can also be utilized as a training center and meeting area for the stakeholders of the project.

At the infancy of the program, Father Alarcon spearheaded visits to the REAP learning sites along with some volunteer Guidance Counselors, Coordinators and Tutors from Angelicum College, Quezon City. The REAP partner communities would have to express through writing their intention to be assessed and later on recognized as one of REAP's learning sites. Success in the assessment process requires

that the learning site is located in poor urban and rural communities anywhere in the country where there is evident high prevalence of school drop-outs. The center should be able to organize and mobilize their very own natives or locals of known positive reputation as volunteer coordinators and tutors. The volunteer tutors maybe teachers, professionals, college students, high school students, or anyone who has the ability to facilitate the learner's understanding of his lessons given in the learning modules. The program also requires solid organizational structures both from its local people, non-government organizations, civic and non-professional groups to be able to encourage the replication and expansion of the program in the different areas of its locality. Road access to the learning site and the absence of armed conflict is also considered for recognition of the learning site. Each site must have at least 10 to 25 willing and qualified learners displaying a strong desire to continue and finish basic education. Partner communities will have to commit to continuously implement plans in accordance to Angelicum College's mission and vision and sustain its activities as stipulated in the proposed an Action Plan all included together with a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Angelicum College and the implementing locally-based partner.

The partner communities will work closely with Angelicum College, therefore reports and records on the learner's progress should also play a very important role in the program. Training of volunteer coordinators and tutors will be an activity in support of the program is as important as the learners. The Action Plan of the Partner Community also includes its "After Care Program" for REAP learners, that is learners upon graduation from the program either elementary or high school level will still be guided through until they find appropriate utilization of their acquired education. This and all other measures and dialogues ensure great success in all parties and partnerships involve.

2. The Community Support Network and REAP Volunteers

A Viable and Cost-Effective Mode of Educational Service Delivery

Once a REAP program is to be established in a locality, the partner communities should have installed and established a pool of committed volunteers for easy and smooth implementation of the program. Only through the dedication of the Community Support Network and its REAP Volunteer would ensure success in the cost-effective mode of educational service delivery. Parents are free from the usual demands and expenditures of a traditional school and the school itself is also free from the usual teacher salaries since the program does not require a regular day-to-day student-teacher interaction. However, the partner communities shall assign a paid Coordinator who shall be the direct local contact between Angelicum

College and the REAP Learning Site's LGU, community, people and other sectors. Coordinators must manifest desire and commitment in his/her performance of the task at hand. He or she has to know the correct direction and must have constant communication within and between parties to guarantee that the program and all its stakeholders are in proper disposition once the studies commence at the REAP learning site.

Recruitment of the Community Volunteers is done through the efforts of a Volunteer Screening Committee composed of LGU representative, a Barangay Council representative, three community elders and the HSP Coordinator. They will propose potential and qualified Area Volunteer Tutors to handle the learners in their community. Volunteer Tutors facilitate learners in studying their learning modules, direct learners towards accomplishing their goals of independent learning and monitors each individual's progress. In the process, the Volunteer Tutors are the facilitators of learning such that lessons are understood well and that activities are answered independently and correctly by the learners themselves.

Prior to deployment all Community Volunteers they must undergo a series of orientation/training on the project, the Non-Graded System of Education, the curriculum, the teaching and learning materials especially the modules, the HSP concept and mechanics, and volunteer duties and responsibilities.

3. *The Alternative Self-Learning System and the REAP Scholars*

An Avenue for Quality and Flexible Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth

The REAP program follows the non-graded system of Education of Angelicum College, which is an avenue for quality and flexible formal education for out of school children and youth. Learner's performance is not given the conventional grades or numerical equivalents but rather emphasis is given on mastery learning.

Individual applicants must submit an accomplished application form and complete school requirements to Angelicum College through the REAP Learning Site Volunteer Coordinator. Placement Tests and interviews will officially be administered by the Angelicum College Guidance Counselor or Psychometrician to determine his/her year (grade) level and readiness to fit in the program of independent learning. Upon approval the REAP scholar would have to undergo the independent study program which is a form of distance learning. Miller (2001) defines distance learning as:

A mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to students who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom, which at times some find constraining rather than supporting. Based on the philosophy of individual differences, this alternative education offers learners flexibility in responding to each individual unique learning need and access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both.

The REAP program will provide one (1) copy of printed learning modules in all subjects, per level to each REAP Learning Site. Lessons offered in each subject per year level will have at its own set of modules. The modules in each subject area are divided into 10-12 separate learning booklets. The modules are self-learning manuals that contain course objectives, course content, self-administered exercises and activities constructed from elements of the familiar environment of the learner, and pre-test and post-test. A module is equivalent to a lesson in the traditional school setting. Mastery learning is given emphasis with the learning modules serving as the heart of the independent study program, while the learner plays a central role in being responsible in all literacy activities.

A set of module for Science, Math, Filipino, and other subjects are available at the REAP Learning Sites. A learner will independently study each module one at a time on their own at their individual pacing following instructions and undertaking exercises, activities and test to evaluate their own progress. The set of learning modules coupled with other teaching-learning aids, enrichment activities and a mastery test to complete each modular activity are the strategies set for mastery learning. After which the learner is prepared for taking the Achievement Test so that he/she may be able to move on to the next set of module offered in the succeeding subject. Achievement tests are given on a schedule set and administered solely by Angelicum College Volunteer learning facilitators and staff for proper validation of results and ensure that Angelicum College Non-graded System of Education quality learning is achieved. Interventions and coaching will be provided to help each learner cope with their learning difficulties and review plans of their study. Plan of study, scope of lessons, number of modules, speed, mastery learning and decisions on progress of study all depends on the learner himself and the guidance he earns upon consultation with the Volunteer Tutor. Given this avenue of opportunities, a learner is taught to become flexible, creative and responsible in the learning process. Movement from one year (grade) level of learning to the next higher level depends solely on the speed and mastery learning of each individual learner regardless of time within a given school year. Further, a learner must finish each set of module in all subjects in a prescribed curriculum period or an independent learner may even manage to accomplish more than what is suggested for a curriculum year such as

several sets of modules offered in different year (grade) levels, i.e., Math Levels 4 and 5 in one curriculum year. REAP scholars enjoy free full tuition fee for the first academic year and renewable per curriculum year upon compliance with the REAP scholar's obligations. Upon completion of all the academic requirements prescribed to finish the year level, a learner moves up to the next year level until he/she becomes eligible for graduation. A graduate will be awarded his/her diploma and certificate of graduation in the annual Basic Education Commencement Exercises held every end of the school year at Angelicum College, Quezon City.

Henry Levin delivered in his speech in 1999 during the Public-Private Nexus in Education saying that, "Education inherently serves both public and private interests. It addresses public interests by preparing the young to assume adult roles that promote civic responsibility, embrace a common set of economic and political values, and share a common language. Education serves private interest in promoting individual development, understanding, and productivity that contribute to adult productivity and well-being."

Education has to go back or at least bring back its noble purpose to young people in search of learning and not academic discrimination. The response of Angelicum College to the demands of time is obvious. Education is a key to progress of our nation, it builds and empowers its citizens and brings them away from illiteracy a hindrance to nation development and citizen independence. Values are created within the context of the Angelicum Non-Graded System of Education offered through its REAP program. It develops social awareness and responsibility among learners, parents and stakeholders. It enables learners' of-all-ages to embrace intellectual honesty, personal accountability and freedom to direct and express oneself. Learners previously denied of education due to poverty are now being equipped through education a life-long process that would change their perspective, productivity, and lives forever.

Conclusion

One of the most important questions about schooling was when, Sir Ken Robinson, a British educationist and philosopher asked, "What is education for?" A timely question when the complaints on the dissatisfaction about schooling in our time has become epidemic among young people. Boredom, demotivating uninspiring, prosaic are few of the adjectives that describe the business of schools today, universities included. Sir Robinson's book *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative* (2011) would state that when almost everything had changed, evolved, transformed in this world, education system had been left behind. Schools and the

issue of teaching and learning fall short in addressing the context of twenty-first century learning. Educational system remains to be in the shackles of eighteenth, nineteenth or even twentieth century assembly line model of teaching and learning. A vestige of the success of the industrial era a way too far already from our time, which learner-centeredness and the call for the over all reformed of education in the twenty-first century is trying to challenge.

The thoughts of hedge fund practitioner turned educator by the name of Salman Khan, the founder of the on-line learning site The Khan Academy is not far from attempting to reform schooling in the twenty-first century. In his book *The One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined* (2012), Khan mentions, with the advanced use of technology, easy access to information, data, and learning materials plus the natural desire for humans to learn and improve themselves, it would be an insult in the highest degree to see the evidence of uneducated populace anywhere in the world.

It may be a form of a blessing that from time to time there are still pockets of opportunities where hopes for reform keep the fire alive in the field of education. Just as the true prophets in the Old Testament were scarce, their preaching of repentance were ardent, urgent, and worth pondering. The educational system in the Philippines is not in a satisfactory state. Prevailing problems such as lack of teachers, lack of classrooms, lack of material and financial resources, yearly big number of drop-outs because of poverty and family issues, and the like, has become a cyclic complaints. The country may be lacking in everything except maybe in imagination and the effort to see the situation of society's educational system in much brighter perspective if one is explorative, resourceful, think differently, use much one's common sense and with a heart filled with compassion. That is the legacy the educator and education reformist Rev. Fr. Rogelio B. Alarcon, O.P., is contributing to the field of education. ■

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