

On Education

by **DILA** Phils. Foundation Inc.

There are to be almost 20 million schoolchildren enrolled in 2002-2003. Under the Basic Education Curriculum of Secretary Roco, their instruction will begin to focus only on the five subjects of Filipino, English, Mathematics, Science and Makabayan.

How does the DepEd propose to improve the National Elementary Achievement Test (NEAT) scores of Grade 6 pupils which in 2001 stood at a low 51.7 percent when the passing mark is 75 percent? By increasing the time devoted each day to Filipino language indoctrination to 80 minutes?

By lumping Geography, History, Government and Civics, Home Economics, Livelihood Education, and Music and Arts in Makabayan for elementary? In high school, the chop suey ingredients are Teknolohiya-Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan, Edukasyong Pangkatawan, Araling Panlipunan, Edukasyon sa Pagpapahalaga (Values Education), Philippine History, Asian Studies, World History and Economics.

The megasubject is called Makabayan so, of course, the DepEd will teach it in the Filipino national language. DepEd's reason is that Filipino is better comprehended by schoolchildren than any other language. Nothing can be farther from the truth. Under the past government, the DECS grudgingly conceded that indigenous language instruction was necessary to check the failure of the Filipino-dominated curriculum. They quietly set up laboratory classes in some barrios in what would eventually amount to a futile gesture considering the depth the quality of Philippine education has sunk into.

Inasmuch as much of the NEAT questionnaire is written in Filipino, the DepEd hopes to raise average scores by intensifying Filipino instruction in the elementary. But don't extending class hours for Filipino in school mean that the average pupil is not competent in Filipino in the first place? That makes two things out of the teaching of social and arts subjects in Filipino then. Illogical and irrational.

They are going to teach Filipino for the sake of teaching Filipino. Concern for education is a thing of the distant past. Before Martial Law, primary instruction was in English and the indigenous language. The "isang bansa, isang diwa" ideology of dictatorial rule changed all that was good and that worked well enough before. Now, everything is contingent on the "makabayan" imperative.

Teaching elementary pupils in Filipino guarantees two results. In non-Tagalog schools, the intellectual growth of pupils is stunted and shame of the indigenous language is inculcated in them. It takes not an overabundance of wisdom to conclude that a child taught primarily in his natural language learns best. The effort is less, the cost is less, and education is served.

The DILA Alternative

No self-respecting linguist can state that Filipino is a language apart from Tagalog. Filipino has always been a mere dialect of the Tagalog language. In all non-Tagalog schools, the rightful medium of instruction should be the indigenous language or vernacular. Not Filipino.

Can it be done? Well, before Martial Law, that is exactly how it was officially done. Elementary school teachers are mostly long-time residents who would have no trouble instructing their pupils in the local language. But can the DepEd issue an order for this rather simple matter of switching to local language instruction in elementary and high school?

No. The 1987 Constitution prohibits the disenfranchisement of Filipino in the schools. This same constitution mandates state funds for propagating literacy in Filipino yet proscribes the same for any of the indigenous languages that may otherwise compete with the nationalized dialect.

If to love your indigenous language beyond the silence of your heart is unconstitutional, what then are we to do? Add language iniquity to the growing list of reasons why this brazen blueprint for our demise must go. The survival of our cultural identities demands a protective and nurturing constitution, not a discriminatory one.

Freedom from Filipino means that communities are able to develop and market textbooks in the local language, promote indigenous art and literature, and discard the albatross of cultural inferiority. And if the community so decides to enhance the proficiency of their children in English, let them proceed without the hindrance of overcentralized authority. Filipino has threatened the lives of our indigenous languages for far too long. The time has come to no longer have a national language.

(Question: Is English the national language of the U.S.? The correct answer is no.)