Research Article

The Making of Transformative Teacher-Intellectuals: Implications for Indigenous People Education

1Maria Mercedes E. Arzadon

1College of Education, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City

Correspondence:
Name: Maria Mercedes E. Arzadon
Address of Affiliation: College of Education, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City
Email: mearzadon@up.edu.ph
ABSTRACT

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) through CMO #2 s.2019 has encouraged Higher Education Institutions to establish a program on Indigenous Studies/Education. This paper maintained that long before CHED introduced the policy, the College of Education of the University of the Philippines has contributed to the study of Indigenous Education. The College, through its Educational Foundations courses and its doctorate program on Anthropology and Sociology of Education, has been involved in instruction, research, and extension work among indigenous communities. This paper describes how students are socialized into the program through participation in service-learning activities and ethnographic research. It maintains that IP Education scholars must hold on a dynamic and processual view of culture and identity. They should also be attuned to Critical Pedagogy to enable them to resist being reduced to specialized technicians but instead aim to be transformative intellectuals attuned to unequal power relations in schools.

Keywords: Indigenous People Education; Critical Pedagogy; Educational Foundations; Anthropology and Sociology of Education
Introduction

The inclusion of IP Studies/Education in higher education curricula has been proposed by the Commission on Higher that Education (CHED) through CMO #2 s.2019. This proposal is meant to address the needs of indigenous people (IP) communities as stipulated in Republic Act 10908 or "An Act Mandating the Integration of Filipino-Muslim and Indigenous Peoples History, Culture and Identity in the Study of Philippine History in both Basic and Higher Education" and RA 8371 or the "Indigenous Peoples Rights' Act (IPRA)." This area of study has its counterpart in other universities abroad: Native American Studies in the United States, Aboriginal Studies in Australia, and First Nations Studies in Canada. These programs are interdisciplinary, combining anthropology, history, law, science, and sociology and the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.¹

The study of Educational Anthropology (EA) in the United States was introduced in the 1950s by a group of anthropologists like George Spindler, Margaret Mead, Herve Varenne, and Social Studies educators like Solon Kimball. The first EA conference was held when the US court ruled that racial segregation in schools would be forever prohibited. The lingering effects of the civil rights movement, the coming of migrants from all around the globe, and the Women’s Liberation Movement were part of the social context which influenced the growth of AE (De Marrais, Armstrong & Preissle, 2011).

To support CMO 2 s.2019, CHED is organizing forums to showcase various exemplars and studies on IP Studies/Education. In its first national orientation, CHED invited Dr. Benjamin Abadiano to present the Culture-Based Tertiary Education Courses being offered at the Pamulaan

¹ [https://www.ualberta.ca/native-studies/about-us/what-is-native-studies.html](https://www.ualberta.ca/native-studies/about-us/what-is-native-studies.html)
Center for Indigenous People Education of the University of Southern Philippines at Davao City. In the same event, Dr. Marilyn Ngales of Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) described the university’s outreach and service-learning program among the hunter-gatherer IP communities of Batak, Agta and Ayta. The outreach and service-learning initiatives gave birth to teacher education programs of LPU -- Master in Indigenous Studies and MA Education major in Indigenous Education program.

CMO no. 2, s. 2019 highlights the objective of IP Studies/ Education which is to train teachers and scholars who will help respond to the needs of the IP communities specifically related to poverty, human rights abuse, claim for ancestral domains, self-governance and empowerment. This implies that teachers in IP Education are not just be concerned about knowledge transfer but be involved in the process of social transformation. Henry Giroux (1985), known for his writings in Critical Pedagogy, wrote that teachers should resist being reduced to specialized technicians but instead aim to be transformative intellectuals who “combine scholarly reflection and practice in the service of educating students to be thoughtful, active citizens.”

**UP-CED’s Educational Anthropology**

One case of a higher education initiative on Indigenous Education that supports the intention of CMO no.2 s.2019 is the courses offered by the Educational Foundation's area of the University of the Philippines College of Education (UP-CED). The area offers a Ph.D. Program in Anthropology and Sociology of Education (ASE) and at the same time teaches service courses such as Socio-Cultural Foundations of Education, Educational Anthropology and Educational Sociology. The courses Anthro-Ethnography in Education and Education in Plural Societies are elective subjects.
The Ph.D. in Anthropology and Sociology of Education was conceptualized with the intention of providing the following to its students:

- knowledge of major theories and ways of understanding culture and social forces and their influence on education
- critical and contextual view of the content, process and outcomes of education based on anthropological and sociological concepts; and
- research experience that contributes to the development of grounded theory of Philippine education

This paper seeks to describe what kind of socialization do students experience through the Anthropology and Sociology of Education (ASE) area of the College of Education. What perspectives and practices are inculcated to develop transformative intellectuals who can participate in indigenous education? It traces the beginnings of the program, some specific contributions, challenges, and prospects for the future. The data of this study come from interviews with alumni, students, and faculty of the College. My narratives as a graduate student of the ASE program and an instructor of Socio-Cultural Foundations Education were also incorporated.

Critiquing the colonial and mechanistic system of education

The first scholars of the UP College of Education who studied educational anthropology as part of their graduate program were Priscila Manalang, Josefina Cortes, and Julian Abuso. All of them were educated by pioneers of educational anthropology at Stanford University (see UPEAA 2011; Zamora 1976). They came back to the Philippines during a period of student activism and Martial Law when scholars were asserting for filipinization and nationalism of the academia. Manalang and Abuso transformed Educational Anthropology from an elective course for graduate students into a Ph.D. program. The trained educational anthropologists promoted a
contextualized and critical view of education and introduced a novel approach in educational research called ethnography.

Their publications have become a vital resource for students of Philippine education. Dr. Priscila Manalang’s (1970) “A Philippine Rural School: Its Cultural Dimension” highlighted the discontinuities of the school and the life of the barrio. She critiqued the mechanical transmission of knowledge with certainty like the table of multiplication and the names of historical personalities. Manalang said that education should expose children to diverse ideas and opinion and provoke critical thought.

Manalang also wrote that future teachers should not just be taught with ahistorical and “disembodied” educational philosophies from Comenius to John Dewey. Instead, they should know the people’s vision of their society and of how the children of that society could be educated in order that they can participate critically and constructively in realizing that vision (Manalang, 1986).

Dr. Josefina Cortes’ writings became the main texts in educational leadership. Referring to Filipino scholars (pensionados), Cortes wrote, “Thoroughly educated and acculturated in the American way of life, this core group of Filipinos educators has wittingly or unwittingly made the Philippine school system extremely hospitable and receptive to educational theories and practices originating from the United States.” Cortes detailed the continuing American colonization of the Philippine education through the language of instruction, the use of American authored textbooks and curricula (Cortes, 1987). In another paper, Cortes (1990) laid out that paradoxes that Filipino teachers faced: 1) the teacher as a professional vs. the teacher as implementer of prescribed curricula using mandated textbooks and instructional materials; 2) the teacher as a creative and
innovative expert vs. the teacher bound by bureaucratic rules; 3) the teacher as a nationalist vs. the
teacher in a school system dependent on Western theories of learning and technology.

**Viewing culture beyond a listing of artifacts and practices**

Students enrolled in the ASE courses often undergo service-learning experiences and produce papers that study the educational experiences of Filipino learners, especially among the marginalized sectors. The faculty members, often in partnership with students, direct their extension work on indigenous education in the form of teachers training, materials production, and program development. They also write conference papers, publishable articles, and books. Specific examples of these works are cited in the succeeding sections.

Dr. Julian Abuso wrote articles and reports that provided perspectives on how teachers should view culture and education. He critiqued the “pseudo attempts to unite culture and education.” These attempts include the listing of cultural practices and artifacts in the curriculum and deleting content that might be offensive to IP groups. Instead of presenting the culture as something static or a laundry list of clothes, food and festivals, Dr. Abuso proposed that teachers should represent culture as a dynamic process, “as lived and learned by members of society.” He also pointed out that schools should not just be concerned with the goal of cultural maintenance, but it should also participate in social change. In other words, cultural knowledge or practice should not be romanticized as something that is all good. For example, cultural practices that tolerate physical and emotional abuse against women and children must be transformed.

Finally, the school should recognize that education is a cultural process participated by various socializing forces in society (Abuso, 1996). A description of these forces was written by one ASE student, Nenita Capili (1992) in her ethnography on school attrition among children in
a school at Ifugao. The study (a dissertation in Anthropology and Sociology of Education) revealed that the children in the village undergo various forms of education. The “life curriculum” or informal learning being experienced by the children outside the school as they explored their environment became more compelling compared to the formal school curriculum being taught by apathetic teachers.

During his classes, Dr. Abuso would always alert his students’ use of the term education, especially when what they meant was schooling or formal education. He would emphasize that learning happens outside the school. Nonformal education, especially, when energized by the thoughts of Paulo Freire, can lead to social change.

Dr. Abuso participated in forums and conferences on indigenous education organized by government agencies and NGOs like Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao (UGAT) and Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples. He was a part of a group research on literacy practices entitled “Learning from Life: An Ethnographic Study of Functional Literacy in Marginal Philippine Communities” (1994). Finally, he led a team of researchers that produced a handbook, “Culture-Responsive Curriculum for Indigenous People.” This initiative was part of the Third Elementary Education Project of the Department of Education.

“Pamatay na Ethnography”

The former students of Dr. Abuso related that the highlight of their life in graduate school was their experiences in ethnographic research. Ethnography is a qualitative type of research that is often utilized by anthropologists and other social scientists. Ethnographers immerse themselves in an area and conduct participant observation, interviews and documentary and artifact analysis. The researcher analyses the data from both the insider’s (emic) and outsider’s (etic) point of view.
Students remembered that during the Anthro-ethnography class, Dr. Abuso would give a spirited lecture, detailing the step-by-step process of data collection, analysis, and the writing of “thick description.” An ethnography was a required output of the course, which entailed finding an “alien” research site. Some samples of the site chosen were a cockpit, barbeque stall, jeepney terminal, a rescue center for trafficked women, and a city jail. For rural-based ethnography, Dr. Abuso brought his classes for immersion in an Ayta community at Loob Bunga, Botolan, Zambales.

As a thesis/dissertation adviser, Abuso was described as thorough, focused (matutok), patient and relentless. He would pore through the manuscript line by line, scrutinizing both the content and form. Abuso had a feel when an ethnography was complete and when themes were adequately developed, otherwise he would say, “Hindi pa yan hinog...maghintay ka pa.” The “ripening” process can sometimes require several revisions. A student reported:

Sabi nila papawisan ka ng dugo. Hindi ka matutulog....Kung tapos ang isang chapter hindi pa yun talaga tapos kasi babalikan pa nya...sasabihin, syanga pala may nakalimutan ako...pabalik-balik kaya naka pitong revisions ako. I once asked him how many have already graduated, he said in my 20 years , you are the 10th..paano pamatay yung dissertation!

The long and tedious advising process became also the opportunity for a mentoring relationship. It was customary for Dr. Abuso to talk lengthily about his experiences during class hours and informal conversations. One graduate remarked:

*My Ph.D. studies helped me how to review (magbusisi) the papers to determine what to publish. I learned a lot from Dr. Abuso’s patience and also from his administrative experience (especially now that I am an administrator myself). Sir would talk about his concerns as a principal and how dealt with concerns that came up... He talked about taking a non-confrontational stance to achieve objectives... minsan kung may isyu sa amin, inisip ko ano nga ba ginagawa ni sir sa ganitong pagkakataon?*
The introduction and assertion of the use of ethnography as a research approach had to confront the prevailing positivistic quantitative research methods.

The research tradition has been dominated by positivism, i.e., research is research only if it adopts certain measures, defines and manipulates variables and test hypotheses...The strong grip of positivism...originates primarily from the long-term dominance of psychology and quantitative sociology over education as applied psychology (Abuso, 1996).

Through time, ethnography became recognized as a credible and rigorous research approach. Several ethnographic works that delved on indigenous issues have been awarded as outstanding thesis/dissertation -- “Community and School-Based Knowledge of Environment in a Fishing and Cultural Barangay” (Cecilia Silao, 2001) and “Identity Construction and Culture Reproduction among Iraya Mangyans: Educational Cultural Process” (Aleli Bawagan, 2008).

**Indigenous People’s Pedagogy of Liberation**

The paper of Gerardo Lanuza “The Struggle for Cultural and Ethnic Justice in the Age of Neoliberal Capitalism: The Case of Indigenous Education Among the Aetas of Botolan, Zambales” peered into the experiences of Ayta children when the department of Education started regulating the indigenous school in the area. Lanuza (2007) analyzed such intervention as a form of “audit culture,” a practice that requires schools to constantly produce evidence to prove that they are doing things the right way based on world-class standards, which are actually capitalist standards.

Lanuza took note of the experiences of discrimination that has been transmitted through generations. He wrote:

The education of Aeta children is purchased at the cost of the pains of discriminations of the past. Discrimination does not only burrow itself deeply in the memories of the victims and survivors, it is also mnemonically etched in their
bodies—in their skin color, hair, and physique. Discrimination is alive among the present generation of native children, and it remains in the memories of the older generation. The power of memory fortifies some members of this older generation to fight in behalf of the new generation. And there is no doubt that the new generation will do the same for the succeeding generations (p. 320).

The teachers and administrators in Loob Bunga designed the curriculum of the indigenous school with the purpose of preserving the people’s rich cultural heritage. Through consultations with the elders, local traditions embedded in dances, stories, folklores, and mores were included in the curriculum. However, Lanuza argued that such initiatives in indigenous education are not enough:

The Aetas as a community are one in asserting and recovering their own indigenous tradition. However, what is missing in this culturalist reading is the other parallax view that would show how this diversity is ultimately configured by the neoliberal capitalist culture industry. The drive for indigenization and asserting cultural autonomy is itself tolerated by neoliberal capitalist-driven multiculturalism: preserve cultural differences, yes! Celebrate exotic ways of life, yes! But do not touch economic inequalities! The struggle for cultural and ethnic justice, to be effective, must be linked with the class struggle. To separate the two is to succumb to the neoliberal capitalist logic of separating the sphere of culture from the economic structure (p.322).

At the end, Lanuza remarked that the school at Loob Bunga, along with community elders, should pursue together a “pedagogy of liberation.” The school with its limitations, can only do so much. The community elders should undertake the task of raising consciousness that would enable the students to challenge the existing capitalist system that seeks to oppress and humanize them.

Recent developments

After the retirement of Dr. Abuso, Dr. Eufracio Abaya, a seasoned anthropologist from the College of Social Science Department, took over the ASE program until 2019. Dr. Abaya compelled the education students who took ASE courses to continuously converse with the works
of social scientists, both foreign and local. Every student of his would remember the piles of articles and books written by social scientists and educationists that he required his students to read and critique. He set high standards for academic discourse, and some of the papers produced from his classes were published or presented in local and international conferences. I benefitted from his tutelage, and I published several articles as a result (see Arzadon, 2016; 2017a; 2017b; Arzadon et al., 2020).

Like his predecessor, Dr. Abaya would often remind his students to be aware of their unquestioned assumptions— one of which is privileging psychology as the only basis for teaching and learning. He demonstrated that a grounding in anthropology and sociology could provide teachers with a broader set of lenses to understand the unequal power relations in schools that privilege some learners and marginalize others. He also warned his students not to perceive culture as bounded and reified (or ahistorical and static) but continuously enacted through power and contestations. Thus, identity should be viewed more as identification, an ongoing process.

Dr. Abaya foregrounded the notion of “teacher agency,” which highlights the teacher’s freedom and capacity to resist or talk back to powerful discourses (promoted by the state and the market) reproduced by the school. Teacher Agency became the theme of the UP-CED’s International Conference on Teacher Education in 2016. In the promotional blurb of the conference are the following words:

*ICTED 2016 foregrounds the theme of teacher agency, defined as the exercise of individual and collective power of teachers in the midst of challenging situations. It aims to create a forum for educationists, social scientists, policy-makers and students to discuss the central question: In what ways can educational reforms support or constrain teacher agency, for what purpose, under what conditions, and with what consequences?*
Dr. Abaya challenged his students to assert their identity as ethical and critical teacher-intellectuals and resist to be subjects of neoliberal education that seeks to make teachers mere technicians or what he called “curriculum dispensers.”

One of Dr. Abaya’s first initiative to strengthen the ASE program was the formation of the education anthropology network. In 2017, the group became duly registered as Society for Strategic Education Studies (S4SES). The group has organized an exhibit on the works of Isabelo de los Reyes, considered as the first Filipino anthropologist and folklorist. Unlike Rizal, del Pilar, and other ilustrados, delos Reyes identified himself as “the brother of the jungle dwellers, the Aeta, the Igorots and the Tinguians” (Aguilar, 2005).

The S4SES also conducted forums and seminars on Contextualization in Education (in various subject areas), Action Research, Educational Ethnography, Music Improvisation, and Music Education Research. Dr. Abaya wrote a research handbook for teachers entitled “Teachers as Ethnographers.” The handbook was originally used in a seminar for teachers in IP communities in Region 2. Working with faculty members from the Special Education (SPED) area, Dr. Abaya led a research project that explored how selected IP communities conceptualize disability. It must be noted that SPED students have long been psychologized and subjected to an oppressive biomedical view of disability (Goodley, 2011). The study on IP/Muslim disability found that IP families and caregivers demonstrate the value of compassion, and they “provide the conditions that will enable the child with a disability (CWD) to perform their skills and capacities, however ‘slow’” (Abaya et al., 2014).

Finally, Dr. Abaya participated in the CHED’s teacher education panel that developed a degree program called Bachelor of Culture and Arts Education. The program aims “to produce highly motivated, creative, and reflexive teachers in basic education equipped with knowledge,
skills, and values in culture and arts education.” Graduates of the program can also take positions in the tourism offices of the local government units and will oversee the management of local museums and art galleries.

Conclusion

This paper detailed the historical unfolding of the Educational Foundations-Anthropology and Sociology of Education area that produced teachers, educationists, and researchers who have contributed to the practice and knowledge production in Indigenous Education. It highlighted only some initiatives of the EDFD-ASE area and did not list down recent programs. One is the production of mother-tongue storybooks among IP communities through service-learning (see Arzadon et al., 2020). Their experiences provide some lessons to Teacher Education Institutions who wish to offer Indigenous Education as an area of study. From the UP-CED’s experience, IP Education to be truly transformative, would need to be grounded on Critical Pedagogy. Giroux (2010) wrote:

*Critical pedagogy, unlike dominant modes of teaching, insists that one of the fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which the discourses of critique and possibility in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom, and equality function to alter, as part of a broader democratic project, the grounds upon which life is lived (p.717).*

Setting up a course or a program on Indigenous Education informed by Critical Pedagogy might be disruptive. It can cause tensions, but it can also stir a productive dialogue that will interrogate long-held propositions about the meaning and end of education and the process of knowledge production and research.
References


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