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DepEd Mother Tongue Instruction

Gerry L. Rivas

San Diego Elementary School
Quezon City, Metro Manila

(An excerpt from <http://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/kk/article/view/1437/1463>)

Recent initiatives on mother tongues revolve around Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education or MLE. It was institutionalized on July 14, 2009 through Order No. 74 of the Department of Education (DepEd), therefore it is believed to have supplanted the country's bilingual education policy (English and Filipino as media of instruction) which has been in place for close to three decades now. The difference between MLE and bilingual policy can be understood essentially in terms of which languages should be the media of instruction. Philippine bilingual education requires English and Filipino, the national language, as media of instruction depending on which subjects are being taught (see Gonzalez; Luzares). MLE, on the other hand, pushes for the mother tongues of students as media of instruction in all subjects. Currently, however, the debates seem to be limited to MLE and bilingual policy issues in the primary grades.

Order No. 74 is based explicitly on assumptions about the "superiority" of the use of mother tongues in education based on successful projects and empirical research which include the Lingua Franca Project of DepEd begun in 1999, an immediate precursor of MLE; the longitudinal study of the Lubuagan Experiment (Walter and Dekker; Dekker and Young) which showed that the educational performance of Primary 1-3 pupils taught in the local language outperformed those taught in English; and the DepEd study (e.g., Lim and Giron) which affirmed international stud-

ies showing that pupils taught mathematics in their mother tongues performed relatively well in international tests.

Support for MLE (though limited to primary education as earlier mentioned) has come from a diverse range of sectors in Philippine society, creating an increasingly coalescing network of initiatives and alliances working for various levels of advocacy for mother tongue instruction, such as macrosystem values, policies and funding, research, and training and resources (Ball). There is currently a pending bill in congress supporting the vision of MLE. It is entitled "The Multilingual Education and Literacy Act of 2008" filed by Valenzuela Representative Magtang-gol Gunigundo founded on similar premises as the DepEd Order No. 74. An opposing bill, also known as House Bill 4701 or the "Gullas Bill" (after its main sponsor Rep. Eduardo Gullas of the First District of Cebu), filed in 2006 but which has evolved into several versions through the years, attempts to re-instate the use of English as the sole medium of instruction in all levels of the educational system. This English-only bill currently has the support of the large majority of the members of the House of Representatives. The opposing bills (English versus the mother tongues as medium of instruction) deviate from past frames of debates in Philippine Congress during which the fight was mainly between English and Filipino.

Similarly based on the same assumptions about the superiority of mother tongues in the facilitation of effective learning in schools, several individuals, government agencies, and professional organizations have also taken an unwavering stand in favor of MLE. These include the Philippine Business for Education, Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino and the Linguistic Society of the Philippines. But what is perhaps more meaningful are the many regional, provincial

Continued on the next page

and school-based initiatives to implement the MLE. These include the National Training of Trainors (TOT) spearheaded by the Department of Education, the formation of new coalitions such as Akademiayang Bisaya Inc (ABI), and the holding of significant conferences such as the 1st Philippine Conference-Workshop on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education sponsored by the 170+ Talaytayan MLE Consortium in Cagayan de Oro City and the MLE-themed Annual Conference and General Assembly of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines in Metro Manila, both in 2010.

It must be highlighted, however, that the MLE framework is really not new (see UNESCO The Use of Vernacular Language). Mother tongue instruction has been vigorously pursued in non-formal/indigenous/minority schools in the country. The mother tongues in these schools have not only served as tools for effective learning, but also as channels for the expression and affirmation of local cultures and identities. These uses of the mother tongues have rarely been questioned because of possibly at least two reasons. The first is that the MLE framework in these places has usually been a part of a larger framework of social and community development where the mother tongues are the “natural”: choice; the second is that it has been used “outside” the mainstream education system where the bilingual education policy was put in place (Canieso-Doronila “The Emergence of Schools”; Tupas “Kalayagan”; Dekker and Young).

K+12's MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION

Joel Pabustan Mallari

KATATAGAN, Inc.

San Fernando, Pampanga

The idea of using a multilingual format of teaching science lessons is in correlation with the recent agenda of Mother Tongue-based MLE programs where most students begin their learning in their home languages either or both oral and written – more easily and with greater comprehension.

Multilingualism is one of the changes in Basic Education Curriculum brought about by the new K+12 program which is the introduction of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) (MTB-MLE, 2012). A widespread understanding of MLE programs suggests that instruction take place in the following stages:

1. Stage I – Learning takes place entirely in the child's home language
2. Stage II – Building fluency in the mother tongue. Introduction of oral L2.
3. Stage III – Building oral fluency in L2. Introduction of literacy in L2.
4. Stage IV – Using both L1 and L2 for lifelong learning.

L1 refers to the first language, the mother tongue of the learners; while L2 is the second language like English and Filipino used in schools and the various formats of mass media. MLE proponents stress that the second language acquisition component is seen as a “two-way” bridge, such that learners gain the ability to move back and forth between their mother tongue and the other tongue(s), rather than simply a