

The Place of Democratic Education in Selected Philippine Public Junior High Schools

Lizamarie Campoamor-Olegario

University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippine.

Abstract

The research looked into the beliefs and practices of social studies teachers in selected Philippine public junior high schools and the factors that hindered teachers from practicing democratic classroom approaches. The handling of social studies classroom is deemed crucial especially for a nation that has been divided by two opposing versions of history. The study found that the social studies teachers believed and practiced teacher-centered approach and managed their classes using behavioristic methods, utilizing punishment and reward system. The teachers preferred traditional paper-and-pencil tests. The lack of meaningfulness of classroom activity and democratic engagement in the classroom was brought about by the teachers limited conceptions of learner-centered approaches. The teachers needed more training and feedback on their implementation of the K-to-12 program's emphasis on constructivist teaching approach. An important issue that needed to be addressed by the Philippine Department of Education is the one raised by the teachers regarding the social studies curriculum. They deem that the Philippine History is necessary to be tackled among the more mature junior high school students compared to the elementary students.

Keywords: democratic education; Social Studies; Philippine public school

Introduction

The education system in the Philippines has been blamed for its failure to educate the citizens on the dark period of the history during the martial law regime under the late President Ferdinand E. Marcos (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016). The textbooks offer limited information and tend to depict the era positively. History professors from top universities of the country have called out the kin of Marcos for distorting facts and claiming that the martial law period was the "golden era" of the country (Suarez, Kalueg, & Mia, 2016).

The existence of a revised history for personal benefit of the Marcoses has caused a divide among the Filipino citizens. There is one group yearning for the return of the "golden age" of Marcos, while there is another group fighting for

“never again to martial law”. While the martial law era in the Philippines witnessed many infrastructures built, thousands of individuals were imprisoned, tortured, killed or disappeared (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2016). The era was also characterized by control of legislature, crony capitalism, graft and corruption, human rights violation, suppression of media, and widespread poverty (Klitgaard in Suarez, Kalueg, & Mia, 2016).

Since 1995, the members of the Marcos family have successfully made a political comeback. The wife of the late President Marcos was elected into office as congresswoman of Leyte (Suarez, Kalueg, & Mia, 2016), while the other members of the family have been elected for national positions. Their rise in political power poses a challenge to educators. Do the citizens lack political discernment? How has social studies been handled for the past years since the Marcoses left the Philippines in 1986?

With the weakening solidarity among the Filipino people, the growing mistrust on one hand and growing trust on the other hand of political leaders, there is a need for democratic citizenship. There is an apparent need for the citizens to understand the political issues better in order to make better political decisions especially in times of elections.

The challenge to educate the Philippine citizenry has become higher because the current administration under President Rodrigo Duterte, the mainstream media have been discredited. A big bulk of the people has resorted to the social media for sources of information, but these social media pages tend to present one-sided and sometimes even fake information. On October 23, 2018, the Facebook closed 95 pages in the Philippines due to spam violations and breach of authenticity policies. Many of them were linked to President Rodrigo Duterte’s supporters and these sites were followed by 4.8 million users (Mariano, 2018). These followers react and even share the posts in the sites.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in fostering democratic citizens and developing a democratic culture (Giroux, 1989; Apple & Beanne, 2011; Biesta, 2007 in Kung & Kasun, 2013). Students need to develop critical historical knowledge, critical sociopolitical literacy, and application with agency, otherwise they will become ahistorical and will have a narrow understanding of the political, social, and economic systems in the society (Hackman in King & Kasun, 2013). Thus, it would be noteworthy to find out to the place of democratic practices in selected public junior high school social studies classrooms is.

Statement of the Problem

The following research questions were central to the study:

- 1) What are beliefs and practices of social studies teachers that support democratic teaching?

- 2) What are the factors that hinder democratic classroom practices in teaching social studies?

Literature Review

Democratic classrooms are environments where students develop their critical thinking skills (Tanriverdi, Ulusoy & Turan, 2012 in Kiroglu, 2013) and learn how to make decisions autonomously, how to lead, how to tolerate different opinions, and how to collaborate with and respect the rights of others in the classroom (Matusova in Kiroglu, 2013). The classroom environment has eight characteristics, namely: 1) active participation; 2) avoidance of text-book dominated instruction; 3) reflective thinking; 4) student decision-making and problem-solving choice; 5) controversial issues; 6) individual responsibilities; 7) recognition of human dignity; and 8) relevance (Kubow and Kinney in Kiroglu, 2013).

Social studies educators need to be knowledgeable about multiple positions on an issue in order to effectively facilitate dialogues that promote critical thinking (King & Kasun, 2013). In preparing students to become participating citizens in a culturally pluralistic, democratic society, the teaching learning experience should be situated within a framework of inquiry (Cochran-Smith, 2005). The students construct new knowledge as relates to issues of importance in their lives. In doing so, they become aware of themselves as participants in local, national, and global communities whose agency is motivated by concerns for equity and social justice (Santora, 2006).

Although learner-centered pedagogy is mandated in many countries, the reality is that teacher-centered pedagogies still dominate (Dube, 2017). According to Mhlauli (2010), the teachers believe in learner-centered pedagogy but practice teacher-centered approaches. The teacher-centered approach to education is referred by Freire (1996) as oppressive and necrophilic in nature because it suppresses the intellect and consciousness of the learner. In this approach, the students do not have contribution and are treated as objects, not subjects. The teachers and students need to shift from banking education pedagogy to a productive learner-centered pedagogy to empower learners to become conscious, critical, and authentic thinker.

Aside from the approach to teaching and learning, Carpenter (2006) points out that there is also a need to look into the curriculum to make sure that it is not inflated with the vast information afforded by various social studies subject areas. Learning a large amount of factual information trivializes the subject matter to be learned. Thus, social studies should be free extraneous content to effectively prepare activist citizens.

Methodology

Ten public junior high school social studies teachers in three different schools in Quezon City, Philippines were interviewed. Classes of four were observed. The study used purposive sampling to increase the range of data and maximize possibilities of uncovering multiple realities. Quezon City was chosen because according to the National Statistics Office (2010), Quezon City was the most populous city in the Philippines with 2.8 million residents. Three-fourths of the population were enrolled in the city's public schools.

The interview lasted for about 45 minutes each. The semi-structured interview schedule has 14 open-ended questions, exploring the teachers' pedagogical beliefs regarding classroom teaching, goal of teaching social studies, and assessment of learning. Probing questions were asked for clarification of meaning, elaborations, and concrete examples. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informal interviews followed the main interview for clarifications, for more information, and for explanation of practices. The interview was conducted in Filipino, unless the interviewee preferred to use the English language

The teacher observations were chronologically recorded using field notes. The foci of the observations were instructional methods, instructional skills, interaction pattern, meaningfulness of learning, and assessment. It is through these areas where the learner-centeredness and teacher-centeredness of the teachers' classroom teaching was determined. Pictures of artifacts such as lesson plans, samples of student work, and visual aids used by the teachers were also taken.

Data were coded through use of words or phrases that describe the ideas and concepts that the teachers conveyed. Codes created were open, emerging from reading and analyzing the data.

Findings and Discussion

Goal of Teaching Social Studies

When asked about the goals of teaching social studies, the teachers responded that it is for the students to apply to present what they learned from the past from their discussion in history. At the same time, the social studies teachers wanted their students to have awareness of what were happening in the society in order for them to have concern for the country as citizens. The teachers believed that this would make them responsible for themselves, for their fellowmen, and for the country. Learning history should enable the students learn what the society can do in the future to avoid the failures in the past.

One of the social issues mentioned was that of the Marcoses. Teacher *Ada* (fictitious names used to protect identity of the teachers) thought that the students needed to know more about the Marcoses because they did not witness any of the events related to them. However, Teacher *Ada* and even other *araling panlipunan* teachers mentioned the limitation of having to start with Asian history, instead of the Philippine history for Grade 7 in the past. Nevertheless, Teacher *Ada* held that the students had to be presented with all sides of the issues.

Love for the country as a result of developing one's identity was not much emphasized. Among the teachers, only one mentioned development of love for the country (Teacher *Allan*) as a goal of teaching social studies.

The results of the study show that the teachers somehow captured the main goals of teaching their respective subjects as stated in the Department of Education curriculum guides. Social Studies teaching aims are to develop identity and civic skills as a Filipino participating in the society, country, and the world and to understand past and present for the future. Nevertheless, the basic skills that need to be developed were not elaborated on by the teachers. To achieve this, investigative, analytical and interpretative, research, communicative, and ethical skills need to be honed. (K to 12 *Araling Panlipunan Curriculum Guide*, 2014).

Teacher-Centered Classroom Teaching Approach

The social studies teachers practice teacher-centered approach. Half of them believed that the teacher-centered approach was particularly fit among those who belong to the lower-performing sections because they are contented in just passing and are nonperforming because of having unsupportive parents (Teacher *Aliyah*). The students from the higher-performing sections were deemed by these teachers as more capable of doing research and doing presentations, thus, could be given lectures coupled with group presentation. Nevertheless, the teachers provided teacher-centered approach. If the students did present their library research findings, the presentations were more in information-giving rather than an exchange of discussions on the content of the presentations. Emphasis both on lecture and group presentations was more on lower-order thinking skills.

The other half of the social studies teachers believed in learner-centered approach, but ended up providing teacher-centered approach in their classrooms. This researcher noticed that these teachers had limited conception of the learner-centered approach, which they described as providing their students group activities such as dramatization and group research using library and internet resources. They had a misconception on their task as facilitators of learning, which for them, simply meant not lecturing in class and having less work because the students were to take much of the workload such as answering the modules provided by the Department of Education.

To add, Teacher Amina, expressed that the reporting tasks could be given to the ones belonging to the lower sections because she described the students as having less capacity. She claimed that in her lectures, she would simplify the lessons and lowered her expectations in recitations. “*Kung papano nila naiintindihan ang topic ganun lang. Di ko ginagawang kumplikado yung alam kong wala silang kakayahan*” (Just according to how they understood the topic. I don’t make it complicated to the ones I know who have less capacity), said that she expected them to report.

Two social studies teachers said that to encourage active participation from the students, they would what they called as “recitation chips”, usually in form of colored papers, to students every time they recite. The students would collect their recitation chips and then by the end of the quarter, count them for an equivalent grade to be given by the teacher. Such approach is highly token economy since the recitation chips serve as reward whenever positive response in form of recitation is given by the student.

According to Teacher Aida, her students got recitation chips even when they gave wrong answers. “*Tama o mali man ang sagot, may chips. Pag tama, isang puntos. Pag mali, kalahating puntos.* (Students should get chips regardless of whether the answer is right or wrong. When [the answer is] correct, they get one point. When wrong, they get half point.)”

In the instructional continuum of Rogers and Frieberg (1994), lecture and recitation are the top most teacher-centered approaches. In lecture, the teacher takes and active role, presenting information to the class, while the students take in the information being provided. In recitation, the teacher initiates the questions and evaluates the response. The evaluation described by the teachers in the use of recitation chips tended to limit the questions to those that would be readily evaluated as right or wrong. Moreover, the teachers believed in motivating their students extrinsically, which was very characteristic of behavioristic, teacher-centered approach.

Behavioristic Classroom Management

The foremost importance of classroom management was stressed by the teachers. The teachers established that classroom management was much more essential in lower sections. They emphasized the need for establishing classroom rules at the beginning of school year and reminding the students the rules henceforth. According to Teacher Aileen, “*Sa umpisa pa lang ng klase ay dapat malinaw na sa kanila ang mga rules sa loob ng klase. At kung sila ay nakakalimot ito ay aking madalas na pinaaalala sa kanila.* (At the beginning of the school year, the classroom rules should be clear already. Then when they [the students] forget, I usually remind them.)”

Teacher Agatha, claimed that she would orient her students of her classroom management style at the beginning of the schoolyear for the students to know how to behave. She believed in giving grade deductions when students did not follow. This is how she thought she would get respect from her students. “*Una palang sinasabi ko sa kanila na kapag nanahimik ako ng isang minuto, alam niyo na ibig sabihin nun. Pag lumagpas dun, siyempre magagalit na. ‘Minus ten ka.’ Pag nagset ka kasi ng standard o policy sa bata, kilala ka nilang ganito at ginagawa mo, yung respeto nakukuha mo. (I tell them that when I keep quiet for one minute, they should know what it means. When my silence reaches ten minutes, I get angry. [I tell them,] ‘You get minus 10’. If you set a standard or policy to the students, and they know that you follow it, you get respect from them.)*”

Teacher Agatha highlighted punishment and reward in her classroom management. She said that she would also give rewards such as praise or exemption from exams when her students meet her expectations. She liked it when her students stayed quiet in the classroom. “*Pero pag natuwa naman ako sa kanila, bibigyan ko din sila ng exemption. Iprapraise ko sila. ‘Wow! Napakagaling naman ng section na to!’ Sa loob ng isang linggo, nanahimik sila. (But when I’m satisfied with what they’ve done, I give them exemption. I praise them. ‘Wow! This section is very good!’ In one week, they behave properly.)*”

Traditional Assessment

The responses of the teachers leaned towards traditional teacher-centered rather than authentic learner-centered assessment tools. This finding was similar to what Duncan (2011) found that many instructors still relied on standardized or traditional forms of assessment because of increasing class enrolments. Teachers lectured more, engaged less with students, and adapted traditional tests measured declarative knowledge or basic facts.

The teacher interviewees stated that they get to find out that their students have learned when they look at the results of the quizzes and chapter tests. When majority of the students pass, they consider that their students had learned. The teachers said that the challenge in assessment was among the lower-performing sections because they would get very low scores in paper-and-pencil tests, even in answering the modules provided to them. Many of them resort to guessing when answering matching type questions.

Factors that Hindered Implementing Learner-Centered Approach

Limited or Inappropriate Construction of Articulated Beliefs.

The teachers had limited or inappropriate construction of articulated beliefs in learner-centered teaching and performance-based learning. The inappropriate

understanding of their articulated beliefs limited their implementation of the approaches that would help support learner-centered approach.

Since the Philippine Department of Education promoted, encouraged, and expected teachers to use learner-centered teaching approaches, the teachers tended to deny that they utilized lecturing, believing that such belief is the opposite of what the Kto12 curriculum was espousing. A common belief about learner-centered approach was that as long as the teachers had activities, the teacher practiced learner-centered approach. “*Kailangan ang activities kasi nakacenter dapat sa bata ang pagtuturo, hindi sa teacher.* (Activities are needed because teaching should be centered on the student, not on the teacher.)” [Teacher Abby]

Some teachers mentioned that the very limited one-week K to 12 training that they had did not fully equip them to implement learner-centered teaching approach. Similar finding was found by Paris and Combs (2006), who proposed that there was little agreement on the meaning of learner-centered approach. Teachers had shallow understandings and conflicting practices relating to it.

The teachers believed that K to 12 curriculum demanded and expected them to implement performance-based instruction, which they understood as making the students perform, that’s why Teacher Abby asked her students to produce a fashion show.

Limitations in Classroom Management and Teaching Strategies.

Teacher Abby had relatively limited years of experience, with only total of five years of experience. She exhibited helplessness in handling her students whom they found to be importunate, noisy, lazy, and un-participative. When asked about the best approach to teach her students, Teacher Abby responded, “*Parang walang effective na approach eh.* (There seems to be no effective approach.)” When probed, Teacher Abby said she would use reward and punishment in the classroom, which is characteristic of a teacher-centered approach. To deal with her students who do not participate in class, Teacher Abby said that the best approach was to set rules and to have conference with her students’ parents. Equipping her with strategies in making uncooperative students participate would assist her in dealing with her students.

Teachers Abby also showed limitations in knowledge of teaching methods. Teacher Abby said, “nothing is effective”. Teachers Abby had limited knowledge in making students relate to the subject matter and scaffold them to be able to grasp their lessons.

Knowledge of classroom management and knowledge of teaching methods were identified by Shulman (1987 as cited in Guerrero, n.d.) as two of the pedagogical components of general pedagogical knowledge. According to Voss, Kunter and Baumert (2011 as cited in Guerrero, n.d.), higher general pedagogical knowledge would lead to quality of instruction according to student perception.

However, general pedagogical knowledge had not been the object of many research studies (Guerrero, n.d.).

Most activities provided by the social studies teachers needed to take into consideration meaningful learning principles. Ausubel (in Ivie, 1998) developed a theory, which contrasted meaningful learning from rote learning. He held that students must relate new knowledge (concepts and propositions) to what they already know.

An example of an activity, which both Teachers Agnes and Teacher Abby used is the activity that they entitled, “Model of Culture Activity”. It can be seen in Teachers’ Agnes description of the activity that she focused more on the way of walking, the challenge of not damaging the costume made of manila paper, and the creativity in designing the costume. Teacher Agnes described the activity as follows:

“Halimbawa, ginawa na namin to. Modelo ng kultura. Halimbawa pinili nila China. Rarampa sila gamit ang music ng China so nasa kanila na kung papano nila dadalhin. Kung halimbawa para siyang bagong tuli kung naglalakad, kasi manila paper lang diba, mababa score nila. Bawal mapunit ang damit. Yun ang una naming challenge sa kanila eh. Makikita mo din na napaka creative ng bata.

(For example, they [the students] choose China. They will walk on an imagined runway using the music of China, so it depends on them how they will carry themselves. If, for example, they walk and appear like newly circumcised because they are just using manila paper, they get lower score. They should be careful not to tear their costumes. That’s the first challenge we give to them. You will see how creative the students are.)”

When asked what the students would learn from the activity, Teacher Agnes explained that the students would see the national costume of the country that they were representing. They would know the language, the culture. The required design to place in the costume should show the religion. Then, the students are asked to explain so that they would see the relevance. They planned for the design and they did brainstorm.

Ausubel (Ivie, 1998) proposed four process by which meaningful learning occur: 1) derivative subsumption, where the new information learned is an example of a concept that is already learned; 2) correlative subsumption, more valuable learning than derivative because it enriches a higher level concept; 3) superordinate learning, wherein the learner already knew many examples of the concept, but did not know the concept until it was taught; and 4) combinatorial learning or learning by analogy.

Thus, the need for deliberate effort to link new knowledge to personal life, prior learning, and environment would make student learning relevant and meaningful. The teachers could link the lessons to their goals like for social awareness, like in the case of Teacher Abby's perceived goal for teaching Social Studies. Her and her colleagues' strategy to make students collaboratively create costumes, for example, to show race, language, and region of the country through drawings on the manila paper costume, required little relevant knowledge to students experience and the goal of the course.

Perceived Limited time.

Part of limitations in classroom management and teaching strategies is the perception of having limited time. While the teachers believed that the best approach in teaching the students was through learner-centered teaching techniques, they raised the need to use direct instruction because of limited time. Teacher Ada, as well as other *araling panlipunan* teachers, resented the fact that the time allotted for *araling panlipunan* was minimized to three hours per week.

Teacher Ada complained, "*Para ngang naging pantay na kami ng values eh. Parang na lessen na yung importance ng kasaysayan. Yun ang nakakalungkot. Paano na appreciate ng bata yung kasaysayan at ang kahalagahan nito?* (We [*araling panlipunan*] are now of the same level as values [education] as if the importance of history lessened. That's sad. How will the students appreciate history and its importance?" She said that *araling panlipunan* used to be one of the core subjects, but not anymore.

Mansour (2009) cited that with time constraints, teachers resort to lecturing and rote memorization. The teachers may also had supported one or several of the cultural myths termed by Tobin and McRobbie (1996) that constrained teachers enact a curriculum. One is the efficiency myth, where teachers believe that because of limited time with much content to cover, they need to control the students, thus become teacher-centered. Another is the myth of rigor, where teachers recognize that the curriculum is something that to be followed, thus should cover the prescribed content. Or the myth of preparing students for examination, where teachers emphasize on low cognitive types of engagement by the students because they believe that students have to be ready in the periodical test by *DepEd*, as in the case of the teachers in the study.

In line with the myths mentioned above, it was evident from the observations that the teachers emphasized low cognitive types of engagements and did not tap critical thinking, problem-solving, higher-order thinking, which were some of the 21st century skills focused on by the K to 12 Curriculum (Kto12 Toolkit). The social studies teachers simply asked students to identify, label, and enumerate. Learning became artificial to the students. When this happened, there were students who lost interest and did not participate actively in the discussion.

Weak School's Administrative Support.

The misconceptions, the limitations on classroom management, and other practices that lacked full and effective implementation of learner-centered approaches could have been lessened if the schools had regular observation and mentoring of teachers.

The social studies teachers in both School A and B make each of their students donate cartolinas for them to have something to use for their visual aids, but they said that they bought other materials such as colored papers for their recitation chips. Also mentioned that while there was a demand for use of ICT in the classroom, the schools do not have enough equipment.

Philippine History in High School Curriculum Needed.

Majority of the social studies teachers were outspoken in their complaint regarding the removal of the Philippine history in junior high school. They took it as not giving much importance to the history of the country.

Teacher Ada felt that Grade 7 students would have better and deeper reception of Philippine History because Grade 7 are more mature than Grades 5 and 6. She said that Grades 5 and 6 students do not have much appreciation in the Philippine history yet. When they reach Grade 7, they may have remembered something, but their learning then was not that deep.

Teacher Agnes felt the same way as Teacher Ada did. Teacher Agnes believed that Grade 6 Philippine history could only cover up to early colonial period. Grade 7 Philippine history should cover the period after early colonial until the recent events. Nevertheless, Teacher Agnes claimed that she would still teach Philippine history in grade 7 because of the students' need to know more about it. "[Nagtuturo ako ng] Asian history pero magPhi-Philippine history ka ulit kasi kulang ang alam ng bata sa Philippine History. Sana hindi nila tinanggal yun. Continuation lang ang grade 7. ([I teach] Asian History, but I still teach Philippine history because students lack knowledge in Philippine History. I hope they didn't remove it and just made Grade 7 just a continuation.)"

The ideas of constructivism, performance task, and learner-centered were good as expressed by the teachers, but they identified valid practical constraints in their implementation of the principles held by the K to 12 curriculum. This finding was similar to that of Bybee and Ben-Zvi (2003 as cited in Elmas at al, 2014) who conveyed that students' level of readiness, time limitations, content overload, and teachers' background and content knowledge inhibited the teachers from implementing what they perceived as positive.

Conclusion



The Philippines junior public high school social studies classes still need to evolve in order to undertake democratic education. While the classes are conducted in Filipino, the main struggle is the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approach, which the educational reform under the new K-to-12 program encourages. The result of the study is very similar to the findings of Dube (2017) in Botswana.

The democratic ideals need to be explicitly stated in the goals of teaching social studies. Aside from the teaching approach, the classroom management and assessment tended to be authoritarian, focusing on punishment and reward and paper-and-pencil tests.

The difficulties in implementing learner-centered approach were rooted from limited understanding of the basic principles of the approach due to limited time allotted by the Department of Education for teacher training. This is coupled by the need for better feedback mechanism in form of teacher observation and mentoring and the teachers' perception that they need to finish the syllabus given by the Department of Education in order for the students to pass the final exam also provided and distributed to all public schools by the Dep Ed.

A major issue presented by the teacher was the removal of Philippine History in the junior high school curriculum because it is already part of the elementary curriculum. The social studies teachers believed that the high school students were more mature for discussions of the Philippine History. The development of the curriculum needs to have more input from the teachers because they are the ones who implement it. ***

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