ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SYSTEM: Empowering Out of School Youth
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Each of the Filipino citizens young or adult has the privilege to undergo formal schooling. However, most of the Filipinos were being deprived of this right due to their destitute conditions and traditional cultures. In so doing, the Department of education has designed a program called Alternative Learning System (ALS) to address this issue and to comply with the UNESCO’S Millennium Development Goal of eradicating illiteracy across nations. Alternative Learning System seeks to serve the Filipinos regardless of their age, educational attainment, race, religion and most importantly economic status. The Philippines set this program to reduce high drop-out rates among public schools and to accelerate numbers of pupils/students participation in the basic education curriculum. This will help strengthen the foundations of attaining the policies and principles laid down in our constitution.

According to Wikipedia a reliable search engine, Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a ladderized, modular non-formal education program in the Philippines for dropouts in elementary and secondary schools, out-of-school youths, non-readers, working Filipinos and even senior citizens. It is part of the education system of the Philippines but an alternative to the regular classroom studies where Filipino students are required to attend daily. The alternative system only requires students to choose schedules according to their choice and availability. The program has two different schematics for conducting instruction; school-based and community-based. On the school-based program, instructions are conducted in school campuses while in the community-based program, formal instruction are conducted in community halls or on private places.

The program is being administered by the Department of Education, it is a government agency in charged in providing education to all Filipinos. After finishing the curriculum within the given time frame, participants of the same program are given equivalent exams covering all the subject areas in the said curriculum. Pupils/students who successfully hurdle the exam will received certificate of completion. The subject areas include English, Mathematics, Sciences, and some areas of Technical and Vocational Training. This program evolved, in fact, in the non-formal education of the country. As compared to our current formal school system, Alternative Learning System offers: a variety of alternative teaching and learning styles, a schedule that is not rigid, better methods of learning, a no strict entry-learner requirements, and the utilization of the authentic assessment methods like self-report and portfolios. The facilitator doesn’t conform himself within the four walls of classroom rather he is roaming around places where he can meet his clientele. Hence he was called as “Mobile Teacher.”
Alternative Learning System implements three major programs, namely: The Basic Literacy Program, The Continuing Education Program, and The Sustainability & Lifelong Program. All three programs are modular and flexible: each one of them can take place anytime and anyplace, depending on the convenience and availability of the learners. Learning sessions are usually held in community learning centers following a schedule agreed upon by the learners and the facilitator.

Alternative learning system in the Philippines has a long history, but its first integration into the mainstream can be traced back to Act No. 1829 in 1908, which was an act that provided for the delivery of civic educational lectures in towns and barrios. In 1936, the Office of Adult Education under the Department of Instruction was created under the Bureau of Public Schools. By 1987, the need for nonformal/alternative learning system was formally recognized in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Today, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines has evolved into a parallel learning system that provides education to the underprivileged and the underserved through means other than the existing formal education instruction. (Galima, Loreta)

Its Vision and Mission

“Empowerment of the Filipino with desirable knowledge, attitudes, values and skills that will enable him to think critically and creatively, act innovatively and humanely in improving the quality of his life and that of his family, community and country.”

“It is envisioned that with the help of ALS, every Filipino will be awakened, empowered, and transformed into a productive, self-reliant, responsible, humane, and upright citizen who can contribute to the betterment of the family, community and country. It is also envisaged that ALS will help alleviate poverty and sustain social and economic growth via the development of employable skills and the generation of self-employment.”

Legal Bases

The governance Act for (R.A. 9155) stipulates the establishment of ALS to provide out-of-school children, youth, and adult population with basic education. Section 12.1 Rules XII of R.A. 9155 stipulates that “the alternative Learning System is a parallel learning system to provide a viable alternative to the existing formal education instruction, encompassing both the non-formal and informal sources of knowledge and skills.
Executive Order No. 117, of 1987, decreed the creation of the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE). The Bureau focused on teaching-learning in non-formal settings for the marginalized sectors. Sec. 5 prescribed the powers and functions of the reorganized ministry of education, culture and sports (signed by Pres. Corazon Aquino) to implement and coordinate the policies, plans, programs, and projects for non-formal and vocational/technical kinds of education, among others.

Alternative Learning System was anchored with some learning theories including Howard Gardner’s “Theory of Multiple Intelligences” it says- we are all able to know the world through language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, the use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of ourselves. Where individuals differ is in the strength of these intelligences - the so-called profile of intelligences - and in the ways in which such intelligences are invoked and combined to carry out different tasks, solve diverse problems, and progress in various domains. In the Alternative Learning System, participants are given chances to learn in varied ways and in their own unique learning styles. Multiple Intelligences are being cater by providing learners differentiated activities and learning modules.

The objectives of Alternative Learning System (ALS) are congruent with the stated goals of the UNESCO’s movement “Education for All”. The said movement was set to underscore alarming rates of school drop-outs, adult illiteracy, and survival rate across grade levels and to give everybody an access to a free and quality education. ALS also contribute to the mission and vision of Department of Education (DepEd) in transforming pupils/students into productive and functionally literate individuals in order to cope up with the challenging time brought by modernization and globalization. Formal education is indeed the ideal stepping stone of everyone to go with the fast changing concept of life, however, non-formal education including Alternative Learning System should also be given equal importance for it is also a good ground for formal training of respective clientele- the Filipino citizens.

References:
(http://www.slideshare.net/jeph_elisha/report-on-alternative-learning-system-by-phoebe-w-taruc)
(Galima, Loreta) Vivian. “Educating dropouts and adult learners in cultural communities: The alternative learning system secondary level accreditation and equivalency program in Ifugao” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the 55th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Fairmont Le Reine Elizabeth, Montreal, Quebec, Canada)
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(http://www.tecweb.org/styles/gardner.html)