SAVE THE CULPRIT

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Today’s era, with its erratic changes, has put humanity into constant transition. Specifically, it has brought countless changes in the academe. Its outcomes necessitate educators and school heads to undergo continuous activities to keep abreast with changes; thus, steps for professional growth and development received greater attention.

Change has not always been positive. In some circumstances, it is marred with downsides which draw drastic responses. Innovations, modifications and additions have been set forth to counter transgressions that come along with the word ‘change’. Different bodies of education continue looking for the best mechanism to assure quality education whilst keeping up with changes. Seminars, conferences, meetings and trainings often result to memos, advisories, orders and the like which bustle teachers amidst their actual teaching time which is supposedly their primary concern. With this being pointed out, the issue of its significance and necessity is something that bothers educators.

Aside from cultivating knowledge and skills among learners, there is one aspect of the learners’ being which needs nurture and time. The values of learners especially at this crucial time when reports have been top charting the mass media manifesting their misconduct and as it may be concluded, lack of proper and enough guidance must be given careful attention and devotion.

It was the ‘last minute’ of 2018 when Filipinos were enraged having watched the viral video of a junior high school student who bullied another student in the bathroom of Ateneo de Manila University. The issue made the netizens clamored for justice and proper action from the said school. This bullying incident occurred on December 19, 2018,
practically days before Christmas. People from different walks of life denounced the incident. Filipinos being satirically humorous made parodies of the video and memes flooded the social media shortly after the video was posted. The netizens did not let go of the issue until no action was taken by the institution. Hate was spread in the virtual world in the season of supposedly love and grace. On the 23rd of December of the same year the incident happened, Ateneo administration imposed the penalty of dismissal on the student after a thorough investigation between 2 parties involved. Naturally, people fanned the heat and reacted on the issue.

In an opinion column published online by Inquiry.net, Rene Saguisag, a former senator, human rights lawyer and advocate, said the Jesuit-run school was "bullied and panicked to announce the right thing at the wrong time." The former senator noted that even the Allies and the Germans observed a truce on Christmas Eve and even sang carols and played football in the middle of World War I. Moreover, he analogized the incident as if the bully got bullied and the rapist got raped. The incident and the action taken were deemed non-equivalent. He also believed that the possibility of change and subjective growth were also shrugged off. He concluded his opinion on a note that even him had benefited from his own failures and so may the student.

This is just one in many other incidents where clearly students seem to do things contradictory to their innocence and purity – attributes which are expected at their age. Lucky are those whose mishaps are not captured and feasted online.

For the unfortunate ones, the pattern is quite evident. It starts with a student who misbehaves and does something wrong. Netizens will then sympathize with the victim who happens to be a student, in Ateneo’s case, as well. Afterwards, people, as it became their habit, magnify the mistake and pin it down on the offender. The pattern ends up with the culprit becoming the victim as a repercussion. The question as to who will save the culprit remain unanswered.
Stating these students are the real culprits is a subject of argument. Social media can actually be one – if not a culprit; perhaps the channel of the culprit. At this age, it is overwhelming how social media can make mountains out of mole hills. It has given excessive and unbounded freedom to all its users. While it connects people, it also burns bridges among us.

With the Ateneo-incident, only few took the time to express understanding towards the offender. As an observation, as if only the intellectuals shared the sentiments of his family and most essentially the boy, himself. Buying a side seemed too easy for the majority of the crowd to the extent that the welfare of the other side was set aside. With all these, the greater importance must lie on making the incident an experience of positive growth for the student, and not something that is morally destructive and fatally threatening. Social media can be a tool for positive support system if used properly. Freedom of expression goes hand in hand with responsibility.

Additionally, parents’ proper guidance to their children must be reinforced. Parents are culprits, too. Nobody can deny the power the parents have over their children. They should be the first ones to teach their kids values. They are the foundation and source of a child’s being.

Just recently, the House committee on justice approved the bill that would lower the age of criminal liability from 15 years old to 9 years old. The still unnumbered House bill would mandate that children 9 to 14 years old who will commit serious crimes – such as murder, parricide, infanticide, serious illegal detention, carnapping, and violation of the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 – be subjected to "mandatory confinement" for rehabilitation at Bahay Pag-asa (Cepeda, 2019).

House justice panel chairperson and Oriental Mindoro 1st District Representative Salvador Leachon who led the house in approving the bill justified that its aim is to protect children from being used by syndicates. Furthermore, he said these children will
not be put in jail but in reformative institutions. They will not also be tagged as criminals, but as “children in conflict with the law.”

If the laws are against these estranged children then who will defend them at their young age. Children need not to be crucified but salvaged.

Children aged 9 years old will be held accountable for their mistakes when it should be clearly the parents. In some states in the US, there are Parental Accountability Laws. This is a theory-based law that stresses the duty of parents to prevent their children from committing crimes. Holding the parents liable is a way to deter juvenile crime. If this will be the case then parents will be alarmed to be as vigilant as possible and will be reminded of their parental responsibilities. Philippines does not need another law or amendment to criminalize people, not to mention children. What this country needs is proper implementation of the existing laws.

With these, the query as to where do we stand, teachers, amidst these political and social issues, needs answering. It is a stimulus that needs response. Perhaps, we can also be put to blame. We are culprits, too.

As early as the age of 3, parents entrust their kids to teachers. And at this age forward, children spend a lot of time with teachers. Out of 365 or 366 days in a year, children consume 200 to 220 days in school showing the great impact a teacher may have on students. Thus, the welfare of children is a joint responsibility of parents, and us, teachers. This only shows the fact that we cannot remove ourselves in the picture. We are liable. We are responsible. We are all culprits.

These issues around us are telling us to reflect on our ways, not just us, teachers, but all of us. After all, it truly takes a village to educate a child. Teachers do not have the monopoly of education. We can all save the culprit.
References:


