THE OPEN HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM ANALYSIS:
BRIDGING THE LEARNING GAP
Marie V. Lozano, Teacher II
Mariveles National High School - Poblacion

In 2004, the Bureau of Secondary Education of the Department of Education (DepEd) headed by Director Lolita Andrada introduced the Open High School Program (OHSP) under the School’s Improvement Plan as solution to the increasing number of out of school youth and decreasing trend of enrolment and survival rate. The innovation in educational reform was formed after reports that access to education dipped to 84.44% and 58.54% in elementary and high school, respectively. The OHSP distance learning was done through the DropOut Reduction Management Program.

As stated in the DepEd manual, the OHSP is an alternative mode of secondary education that uses distance learning. It caters to learners who are unable to attend the regular class program due to physical impairment, work, financial difficulties, distance of home to school, and other justifiable and legitimate reasons. The program is also introduced as part of the Philippine Development Plan (2011-2016) Education For All goal of making every Filipino functionally literate by 2015.

Does the distance learning program resolve the educational issue, or even temporarily meet the needs of students that could not afford to go to school?

Eight years after the formulation of the OHSP, the DepEd has yet to analyze and check what marginalized towns and provinces would need to implement the distance learning program. The OHSP is not automatically implemented by schools. According to the OHSP Manual of the DepEd, public and private schools interested in the program can apply and register with the DepEd Bureau of Secondary Education, given that they meet the requirements.
One of the requirements is the agreement with the local government unit that covers the school, assuring the educational institution that the LGU would provide access to public computers, libraries and Internet. This would ensure that the marginalized youth would have resources and ways to study and get their online modules. The agreement would also provide link with the community for the students’ access to facilities like public library, baranggay learning center, internet café, public sports facilities and those that will help the students in their self-managed learning.

The OHSP definitely bridges the learning gap among the OSY and potential school leavers. It encourages those who are out of school to finish secondary education, reduces high school drop outs and increases participation rate and increases achievement rate through quality distance education.

Notably, the population of OHSP learners has grown from a handful of students when the program was first implemented in SY 2004-2005 to thousands in SY 2012-2013. According to the evaluation and review of the private company Sameo Innotech of the distance learning program, most of the OHSP students came from economically disadvantaged families who lived on the streets or in remote areas. A good number were employed in various blue-collar and service jobs, and therefore had to work “doubly hard” to compensate for lack of financial support. Many of them were overaged and had family obligations. The DepEd, however, has yet to establish the average percentage of students who are currently under the program and figure out the rate difference that it adds to the access to education.

As stipulated by Bataan DepEd District Supervisor Elma P. Dizon, the OHSP is already online in the province, but the participation rate is still low. The educators and DepEd agencies
has yet to inform the institutions and the youth regarding the very comprehensive program to encourage participation.

According to Sameo Innotech, to ensure the success of the program in the coming years, the DepEd should address the weakness of the program. Learning materials, financial support, and capacity building were pointed out as the most deficient components of the OHSP. The number of modules available for distribution to OHSP was inadequate, and many learners had to pay for reproduction to have their own copy. Lack of financial support was acutely felt in more ways than one. Schools had to finance the reproduction of OHSP modules, and had to look for external funds for honoraria of OHSP personnel, particularly the teacher-facilitators.
References:
