
SITE VISIT: PARENTS AS LEARNERS—TOWARD PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION

By Feny de los Angeles-Bautista. "Parents as Learners: Towards Partnership and Participation (Parent Education Programs in the Philippines." Paper prepared for the EFA Forum, New Delhi, September 9-10, 1993.

The Philippines is the home of 11.5 million families, 62 million people (1990). Approximately 46% are below the age of 18, 14% are under the age of five. The people are predominantly Malay, with Chinese, Spanish, Indian and North American settlers forming the minority of the population. There are 110 cultural and linguistic groups in the country; over 87 languages and dialects are spoken.

The Philippines is a land of contrasts. The land is rich and blessed, but the majority of the people live in abject poverty. There are wide disparities between the life conditions of Filipino families across socioeconomic groups. While the elite reside in well-guarded mansions, the plywood, plastic and galvanized iron sheet 'homes' of the urban poor make up the biggest squatter colonies in that part of Asia. Between 1985 and 1988 the top ten percent of all families received more than one-third of all family income. 75% of Filipino families live below the poverty line.

Beyond the physical and social contrasts, the clash of ideas between the pervasive colonial mentality and the emerging fierce nationalism is evident in the people's daily lives.

The Filipino family is undergoing considerable change. Rapid urbanization, rural-urban migration, un- and underemployment, overseas employment, the insurgency problems and continuing war in certain areas of the country are all forces at work. Also, the changing and emerging role of Filipino women at all levels of society is a critical factor in the changing lifestyles and structures of the Filipino family.

Traditionally, children have played a very important role in the Filipino family. It is said that children give the Filipino family its form and structure. Generally, parenting is considered a private, family affair. Contemporary decision-making about parenting is a result of traditional wisdom learned from parents and grandparents, blended with knowledge gained from available literature. At best this results in a good balance between sound indigenous practices that help to transmit the Filipino cultural heritage and more progressive child-rearing practices. Sometimes it can result in conflict and confusion. As families are faced with new challenges and traditional supports are lacking, there is renewed interest in developing support systems for parents to help them achieve a better balance.

Parental support programmes have a long history in the Philippines. They were begun originally in the 1930s by the then Department of Agriculture. Over time parent programmes have been implemented by the Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, the National Population Commission, the Department of Education, and the Bureau of Agricultural Extension. Government efforts have been complemented by contributions from major donor agencies such as UNICEF and WHO. It is out of this history of parent support programmes that the **Parent Effectiveness Services (PES)** came into being.

A basic premise of the PES is that by reaching parents it is possible to reach the children. PES was developed in 1978 by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). To create the programme, groups of parents were organized at the village (*barangay*) level to determine the type of support they required. To further understand the needs, parent congresses were organized at the municipal, regional and national level with representatives from the neighbourhood groups as participants. A parent education programme was then designed, based on what was learned through this consultative process. A manual was developed which prescribes the content and methods for the parent education programme. This manual is used by social workers as they work with communities.

PES, which currently resides in the Bureau of Family and Community Welfare (BFCW) within the DSWD, is part of a much larger government-sponsored Early Childhood Enrichment Programme (ECEP) that includes centre-based (day-care centres, child-minding centers, supervised neighborhood playgroups) and school-based programmes. The ECEP was developed in collaboration with UNICEF, which funded the programme from 1981-1983. In 1984 the DSWD took over full responsibility and now government funds cover salaries of programme supervisors, training of day-care workers, and the purchase of teaching materials for the home-based programme. Since 1991, under the Local Government Code, powers have been decentralized. Local government units are now directly in charge of implementing the PES.

How does PES work? The primary strategy within PES is to reach parents through the Neighbourhood Parent Effectiveness Assembly (NPEA). This is a group of 10-20 parents who get together weekly to discuss common parenting problems and their solutions. While families with children from birth to 6 years of age who might benefit from the programme are identified by the trained ECCD worker from the local government unit, participation is voluntary and open to all interested in attending.

A session generally consists of the following:

- 1) Opening activities help bring the group together.
- 2) There is a discussion of how the parents applied what they learned from the previous session.
- 3) The topic scheduled for the day is presented through an activity. This could include such things as responsible parenthood, family relationships, health care, child development, recognition and management of disabilities, nutrition, etc.
- 4) Specific activities are identified that parents can undertake in relation to the topic.

5) The session ends with a summary of the major points and planning for the next session. Resource materials are available for parents to borrow and purchase.

Home visiting is a complement to the NPEA. Home visits are made when parents join the assembly to orient them to the group. The visit provides the social worker with an opportunity to learn more about the family as well. From then on home visits are used on an as-needed basis. When families require additional support or when they have missed the group for a number of sessions, or if parents request a home visit, these are made by the PES staff. A new component of PES is a radio programme being developed in cooperation with the Philippine Children's Television Foundation.

There are two type of staff for the programme. There are the professional Social Workers, hired by local government. They receive a five-day training in the implementation of PES. Guided group discussion and role-playing are an important part of this training. The social workers work side-by-side with PES volunteers, who are parents from the community that have been trained to facilitate the groups and conduct home visits. Training for the volunteers includes a 3-day orientation, followed by a one-month practicum. This is followed by another 2 days of training to consolidate what the volunteer has learned and to plan future activities. Annually there is a refresher training.

In 1987-89 an evaluation was conducted. It revealed strengths and weaknesses of the programme, but by and large PES was deemed effective. The issues identified in the evaluation were addressed as an expanded version of the programme was formulated. To strengthen the program, PES training was revised, and in 1991 a new handbook was produced and additional materials were developed for use by the PES volunteers.

The evaluation revealed that the quality of PES depends greatly upon the skills of the PES volunteer and the support mechanisms available to them through the programme supervisors at the national, regional and municipal levels.

UNICEF continues to be a partner in the implementation of PES. In the programme of cooperation between UNICEF and the government of the Philippines for 1994-1998 there are several proposed actions:

The **home-based programme will be strengthened** as this is seen as a major strategy and a low-cost approach to providing ECCD services to children. The expanded home-based component will be implemented in 7 depressed provinces where there is a convergence of social services, in 13 provinces where the low education levels indicate greatest need, and in 5 provinces affected by natural and man-made disasters.

There will be **increased investment in training and supervision** and the development of training materials. The goal is to train 2,000 community volunteers (parent leaders) as facilitators and 325 people to serve as supervisors. 150,000 different sets of materials will be distributed to 3 million parents in 25 provinces. Other materials will be developed to facilitate training.

A core of trainers will train 900 (2 for each *barangay*) youth volunteers on approaches and techniques in **mobilizing community participation and support** for early childhood programmes. Through the use of theatre arts and indigenous folk media it is hoped to get the community more involved in helping to sustain the programme. One goal is to get a variety of NGOs involved in the programme.

An additional goal will be to expand programme content in terms of: **activities that promote gender equity; increasing the role of fathers in child-rearing; and issues related to shared and single-parenting.**

In 1978 when PES started it was being implemented at the municipal level by 120 social workers. In 1991, 143,000 parents were served. In 1992 this increased to 160,000 parents (192,146 children) in 1,500 municipalities throughout 14 regions of the country. Working with these parents were 1,672 Early Childhood Care and Development workers in local government units and 1,452 PES Volunteers. PES has also been implemented in centre-based programmes by 18,633 day-care workers.

The costs of this programme were calculated, based on the government and UNICEF input and the number of families and children served in 1992. The cost per parent was approximately \$1.00/year. The costs per child were \$.81/year. The time contributed by the parent volunteers was not taken into account in these calculations.

In sum, all over the Philippines, through the PES and the many NGO programmes for parents and families, lessons are being learned about children and parents and how they grow, develop and learn. These teach us that an investment in parents is a major investment in child growth and development. And while parent education programmes will not be the major solution nor substitute for the basic social services, they are part of a broader framework of community development.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
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