

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION IN THE PHILIPPINES: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper criticizes the Philippine Education Curriculum's attempt at embracing and implementing multiculturalism. Specifically, it aims to expose the recurring issues of *instruction paradigm* seen in existing pedagogy. Using Charles Taylor's view of *Identity Politics*, as well as Paolo Freire's *Banking Concept* in education, and Jean Paul-Sartre's *existential phenomenology*, this paper points out the issues in Philippine Education's instructional paradigm leading to oppression. Reflexivity is given emphasis to build on the theme of identity and recognition embedded in the discussion. In this paper, I exposed the main challenge of multicultural education in a predominant *instruction-centered* paradigm, which is politics of recognition in the classrooms, resulting to [what I posit as] *academic othering*, which I consider as the cornerstone of an age-old oppressive paradigm in Philippine education. Such problem is characterized by the imbalance in the power relations that is not just imposed onto the students, but has been institutionalized historically as an unconscious yet structurally-motivated way of oppression in education. Despite the promising goal of multiculturalism in the Philippines, our education continues to struggle with the challenges of creating equal opportunities and proper treatment of individual and communal differences.

Keywords: academic othering, existential phenomenology, identity politics, instruction paradigm, multiculturalism, reflexivity

1.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The Philippines is a nation of multiple races, cultures, traditions, and religions. Because of that, diversity has become progressively reflected in Philippine Education. With the different demographic, economic, religious and social trends represented in the classrooms, both in public and private institutions, from primary to tertiary education, the Philippine education curriculum has gone through a lot of revisions and improvements, seeking the best possible standard that will prepare students to be academically competent and culturally diverse in both local and global endeavors. The idea of preservation of cultural diversity, particularly in education, is central to the discussion on multicultural education, as it fosters the value of individual and cultural recognition, which is deemed necessary by Charles Taylor's multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is the co-existence of diverse cultures which includes racial, ethnic and religious groups, among many; and the acknowledgement of their differences within a dominant socio-political culture. It seeks for people groups' protection of the law, as well as equal rights and opportunities for the minority. Eagan (2015) states that multiculturalism is both a response to cultural pluralism in modern democracies and a way of bridging gaps among cultural groups, in response to historic exclusion, discrimination, and oppression. Multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture. (Eagan, 2015)

However, multiculturalism stands challenged in some settings like liberal democracies, where all citizens are equally treated under governing policies. The tendency to homogenize the culture remains problematic as individuals of differing background are treated same and equal through their common identity. Such common identity is an abstraction of minority groups' social, cultural, political and class status, including gender and religion. In effect, differences are ignored and an adherence to a single culture trumps over the celebration of diversity. These challenges are seen recurring in educational settings.

Education is one of the spheres where multiculturalism is taught, experienced, and even tested at an early stage. It is a breeding ground for equality, social justice and democracy to be practiced. In the Philippines, for example, because of the plurality of local, regional and even international cultures, multiculturalism is expected to be observed and honed in the classrooms. In a multicultural classroom, students are not just expected to freely express who they are, but also learn and respect other cultures. It is where students learn to be ethical citizens of the world, where each culture, regardless of size or color, is treated and advocated for equally. It is an environment that provides and protects students' commitment to their own respective cultures as well as learn from other cultures represented. It is, therefore, the duty of an educational institution to ensure that an individual, regardless of collective or individual identity, is treated fairly and able to express in a free, non-threatening environment.

Significant local studies on Multicultural Education explored important demographic, pedagogical, and methodological possibilities of multiculturalism in Philippine classrooms. Palces, Abulencia & Reyes (2015) in their research titled *Predicting the Priorities of Multicultural Education in a Philippine Teacher Education Institution: An Exploratory Study* made a demographic study of university students on their sensitivities and biases when it comes to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and class, which resulted in a low diversity among the respondents. On a different note, Reyes & Muray-Harvey's (2018) paper focuses on *Developing a Multicultural Teacher Education Curriculum Using a Collaborative- Participatory Approach*. In this paper, they identified that active participation of faculty, student teachers, and the administrators benefitted the creation of a multicultural curriculum. Munalim (2019), problematizes the global integration of a university in the Philippines in terms of micro and macro multicultural practices, and exposed that knowledge construction and developing a strong school culture are some of the factors for improvement.

With these gaps presented by local studies, I would like to make a case that a critical discussion about identity politics or the politics of recognition, as coined by Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor (1991, 1994) is crucial and necessary to the discourse of multicultural education.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This paper presents a critical discussion on identity, politics of recognition, and educational paradigms, which are all integral to the incessant pursuit of multicultural education. Necessary to the trajectory of this discussion is a comparative discourse on learning paradigm, where multicultural education thrives, and instruction-centered paradigm of education as the embedded source of subtle oppression, resulting in identity politics. This paper will use Charles Taylor (1991, 1994), Jean-Paul Sartre (1943), and Paulo Freire's (1970, 2005) philosophical theories, as well as a working knowledge of reflexivity as a research methodology. Overall, this paper shall contribute to the body of knowledge in three ways: as an existing study in multicultural education, as a philosophical discourse on individual and cultural, as well as political, identity, and as contribution to the growing literature on *reflexivity* as a research method.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Charles Taylor and Identity Politics

As a key figure in multicultural education, Charles Taylor (1991, 1994), a Canadian Philosophy of Education researcher and advocate of multiculturalism, presents his philosophy of identity politics as rooted in the politics of recognition. The idea of recognition, as foundation of multiculturalism, is essential to the discussion on multicultural education. It is, therefore, necessary to the development of this study to look at its brief background to deepen our understanding of the problems attached to the idea of multicultural education.

To begin with, Taylor (1994) discusses the politics of recognition by acknowledging that a significant number of issues in today's philosophy, culture and politics, including those relating to global affairs, rights of the minority groups, gender, and ethnic plurality, among many, is contingent on the necessity for recognition. The idea of recognition, as Taylor explicitly points out, is not just the mere acknowledgement of a person or a group, but an equal treatment of such in a given space where plurality of identities coexists. This idea of recognition is seen both as an important and urgent end-goal of multiculturalism because of how it essentially builds the concept of identity, which Taylor defines as 'a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being' (Gutmann, 1994:25). In a way, *nonrecognition* and *misrecognition* became the adversarial offshoot of recognition, where most of the problems on multiculturalism lie.

Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being ... misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need." (Taylor, 1994: 98)

In a pluralistic society, such as in Western states, as well as in the Philippines, the tendency to categorize, if not stereotype, causes hindrance to the acceptance of multiculturalism. Categories such as feminine, gay, white, black, disabled, muslim, mistress, informal settlers ("squatters"), yellows (pertaining to followers of "Liberal" political party), OFWs, etc., leads to pejorative connotations. Such categories on race, gender, occupation, economic status, politics, race and sexual orientation, among many, as pointed by John Willinsky (1998), can be used as instruments of power and exclusion, which may lead to oppression of the one being categorized. Taylor (1994) furthered it by saying that 'nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being' (p.25). Categories, whether intentional or not, undermines people's right for recognition of identity equal with others on a given space.

With these harmful categories, Willinsky (1998) attempts to trace how such categories came to be and formed over time. It is when education plays a significant role in the unfolding and reduction, if not elimination, of the problem. According to Willinsky (1998), as mentioned by Anthony Palma (2014), education in the politics of recognition can help to equip students with a deeper understanding of the genesis of human categorization, leading to a more profound level of critical thinking in relation to public policy, media reportage, academic scholarship, and the like.

Although one is limited to know the intention behind a category and the perception people will have of it, it often always leads to stereotypes. Despite the fact that negative categories may be unintentional, stereotypes can and do emerge. Taylor & Gaonkar (2006) in a related article coined the term *block thinking* referring to the false generalization of a specific group which 'fuses a varied reality into a single indissoluble unity' (p. 453). People's capacity to recognize the plurality of identities free from prejudices and stereotypes has continued to be a struggle among different states and cultures. The Philippines, as a postcolonial nation, continues to face these challenges, and educational reforms are set to prevent these problems, at least, in the academe. While problems already existing among older generations are much more challenging to address, it is the trust of the educational system to prevent these problems from propagating. Hence, recognition of identities in education is a key to mend these gaps. Multicultural education, therefore, purports an ideal role in revising these cultural disparities.

Multicultural Education, from The West to The Philippines

Noteworthy to understand, however, are some of the existing remonstrances when it comes to embracing and implementing multicultural education in the Philippines. To account these, it is requisite for us to take a quick look at the history of multicultural education.

According to Banks, Cortes, Gay, Garcia, & Ochoa (1991), the emergence of multicultural education can be traced back from the 1960 and 1970 civil rights movement in the West. It was motivated out of the demands of ethnic groups for inclusion in educational curricula. Deeper than that, it has deep historical roots in the African-American ethnic studies movement that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the ethnic studies movement was reawakened in the 1960s, marginalized ethnic groups, specifically, but not limited to, African-Americans, refused the recurring demands to renounce their cultural identity and heritage. Instead, they demand that their historical and cultural accounts be included in the educational curriculum. In challenging the dominant educational paradigms multicultural educators and scholars sought to transform the Eurocentric perspective and co-opt plurality of perspectives into the curriculum.

In the late 1980s scholars of multicultural education deemed the former movement insufficient, as ethnic and cultural inclusion needed a deeper structural reform, incorporating recognition of other categories, such as social class, language and gender (Banks, 1993: 3-49). Multicultural education became concerned with how these social variables interact in identity formation, and about the consequences of multiple and contextual identities for teaching and learning. In effect, more ethnic contents have appeared in the instructional materials used in primary and secondary schools in the United States, particularly with their textbooks. In relation to that, anthologies in literature as part of the English curriculum welcomed selections written by women and authors of different ethnicities and nationalities. In the tertiary level, the production of books and other instructional materials dealing with multicultural education has grown exponentially. To the interest of further studies, prominent universities also included ethnic studies in their prerequisite courses, like the University of California at Berkeley and the

University of Minnesota, to name a few. (Banks, 2001) (Gay, 2003, 2004) These historical influences have reached the Philippine archipelago in the early 20th century, as the Americans colonized the country and brought public education, which until now is going through developments and further adjustments.

From the establishment of public education in the Philippines during the 1900s, until the recent developments in curriculum and instruction, such as the Commonwealth Act 586, where elementary school system is recognized, the increase of Philippine-oriented instructional materials under Memorandum No. 30 of 1966, the integrative learning approach of the Revised Basic Education Curriculum of 2002, and the recent transition to the K to 12 program last 2011 (Dep.Ed), to name a few, the teacher has been considered as the front and center of education. The teacher acts as the source of learning, the wealth of wisdom, and the final authority in the classroom; not to mention matters of assessment and evaluation, which is also centered on the teacher. The student, in the whole journey of Philippine education, I argue, is seen as secondary, subordinate and dependent on the teacher. On matters of power relations, the teacher is always seen as the *dominant voice* and the student as the inferior. It is with this framework that I, as a researcher, outlines the direction of this paper. From the promising goals of multiculturalism, where identity of an individual is regarded as equally important as collective identities, to an educational paradigm where an individual's identity, by this I mean individual unique celebrated difference, is, as I claim, not given space to be fully recognized in consequence of an old educational paradigm that is, in nature, oppressive.

Educational Paradigms and Paulo Freire's Banking Concept

In many literatures in education, *instruction-centered* paradigm often points out to the teacher as the main agent of learning. This traditional view of education, also called *teacher-centered* approach, empowers the teacher as the authority that designs, implements and assesses students' academic development; contrary to the 21st century *learner-centered* paradigm of education, where learners are co-designers, implementors, and assessors of their own academic development. Also known as *student-centered learning* approach, the learning paradigm of education gives students 'more control over their learning; it offers them choices about what and how to learn, a variety of activities and assignments, and more firsthand exploratory learning opportunities; and it is more interactive' (Doyle and Tagg, 2008: 30)

Despite criticisms on the former, efforts to shift to a *learner-centered* paradigm, exposes challenging limitations and even resistance. In the article *Why students Resist Learner-Centered Teaching*, Doyle and Tagg (2008) said, 'This discontent occurred even though faculty started their implementation process slowly and introduced only a few changes. The reason for the hostility is the powerfully entrenched *teacher-centered* view of learning these students possess' (Doyle and Tagg, 2008: 19) This tradition in education is the corner stone of what I call educational oppression - an imbalance in the power relations that is not just imposed onto the students, but has been institutionalized historically to the point where students are unconsciously becoming slaves to an educational system of "*academic othering*."

This academic othering is characterized by students' dependence on teacher's strategy, classroom administration, measurement and evaluation, and other *teacher-centered* activities, both the expected and the ones disguised in academic freedom. The subtle oppression in education is not just happening in the West, but even here in the Philippines. Locally, the teacher is seen as a representation of knowledge and wisdom. Hence, teacher's instructions inside the classroom are deemed to be the formal way of teaching, and students learn primarily on what the teacher teaches. As Alan Guskin (1994) pointed out, 'the primary learning environment for [undergraduate] students, the fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk, and most students listen, is contrary to almost every principle of optimal settings for student learning' (Guskin, 1994: 20).

This is consistent with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 2000) and his critique which he called as the dominant *Banking Concept* in education. Here, he pointed out the imbalance of power in the teacher-student relationship, calling the former an agent of oppression. As a systemic problem, he accounted the traditional view of the teacher as the liberator, the knowledgeable, and the sole authority in the classroom. He said, 'knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (p.72).

As a counter argument, Freire (2000) proposed his 'problem-posing method', encouraging *praxis* as a practice of freedom through the balance of power. (2000: 81). Freire explained, 'Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (2000: 80). He added, 'the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students. The students – no longer docile listeners – are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own' (2000: 81).

Reflexivity as a Research Methodology

Reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical re-dispositions, and preferences. It is an acknowledgement of the inquirer's place in the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand and a means for a critical examination of the entire research process (Schwandt, 1997). In reflexivity, the text becomes a co-constructed space that reveals the interaction between the researcher's assumptions and personality and the voices, stories and experiences of the research subjects.

During the last decades, researchers in the fields of education, humanities, social and behavioral sciences have presented evidences that personal, social, and local factors influence the research process and its results. This includes research teams, working practices in laboratories, and personal characters and narratives of a researcher, to name a few. Despite that, the impact of using reflexivity as a research method is not acknowledged and many traditional researchers still regress to standardized objective methods of data collection and interpretation. (Breuer, et, al., 2002)

More so, phenomenological narratives as part of qualitative research characteristically do not use standardized procedures, and this leads to the perception that research of this kind is replete with errors and therefore "suspicious" in some social disciplinary "communities." However, doing research based on lived experiences and narratives make the impact of the researcher far more obvious than in its quantitative counterpart: the interactional and constructional nature of epistemological processes become more than elsewhere evident and can be experienced in existential ways. The relevant contexts include fieldwork, intensive interviews, and other "close-range" techniques. From this perspective, qualitative researchers tend to deal with this challenge and engage with it in a reflexive way (Breuer, et, al., 2002).

The shift to reflexive narratives in social research acknowledges that as researchers we are all very different people, 'coloured' by our own origins, contexts and 'beings in the world', as Feighery (2006) stated. Most researchers are becoming aware of these possible 'behind the scenes' aspects of research which significantly influence knowledge production. As Schick (2002) puts it, 'Factors such as the professional, situational, cultural, and interpersonal relationships between researchers are rarely addressed in methods sections of research reports or in methods texts' (p.632).

Using reflexivity, however, is not without challenge, as Finlay (2002), Hertz (1997) and Hollinshead & Jamal (2001) exposed. Finlay (2002), for example, reminds us that '[W]hen it comes to practice, the process of engaging in reflexivity is perilous, full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails' (p.212). More specifically, it refers to the necessity of 'finding a balance between

personal disclosures of self and research participants's voices', which may lead to an underrepresentation of the research subjects. (Finlay, 2002: 212)

Similarly, Hertz (1997) points out that there is a wide acknowledgement among researchers that 'revealing oneself is not easy' (Hertz, 1997; xvi), and that the different styles of interpretative / ethnographic / textual insight that course through qualitative techniques are both 'soft opinions' as pointed out by Hollinshead & Jamal (2001). More so, personal decisions have to be made by qualitative researchers as to how much of their 'self' may be inscribed in their research. This situation, according to Finlay (2002), 'is often compounded by institutional and disciplinary discourses which disparage reflexivity accounts as 'unscientific'' (p.212).

In contrast, Feighery (2006) counters Hertz (1997) expositions by pointing out that for the most part, 'social scientists learn to present their 'findings' through disciplinary guidelines, which, in fact, also establish the presentation of the author's voice (Hertz, 1997; xiv)'. This, according to Feighery (2006), leads to what he calls "The Myth of Voiceless Writing". In his article *Reflexivity and Tourism Research: Telling An(Other) Story*, he claims that in social research, 'respondents' voices are 'meditated through the researcher's chosen voice 'position' (p.274). Even in research reports which provide a space for respondents to 'speak', their utterances are usually carefully selected to enable the construction of a 'text' which contributes to the advancement of some predetermined research agenda' (Feighery, 2006: 274). Also, it challenges what Geertz (1998) refers to as 'author-evacuated' texts, namely 'texts that neglect the existence of an author or research behind the research outcome' (Mura, 2013: 2). Hence, the researcher, as a dominant voice in the text, employs a reflective activity that will eventually lead to a reflexive stand. To an extent, reflection is foundational for one to arrive at being reflexive.

Sartre's Reflective Consciousness

The question of reflection is one of the guiding themes of 20th century philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's early thought. Although Sartre's attention to this question is not always explicit, it provides the thread in terms of which much of his theory can be understood. Reflection originally appears as an epistemological problem in his book *Transcendence of the Ego and Being and Nothingness*. Sartre presented what he calls as pure reflection, which is central to his philosophical methodology and the relationship between one's consciousness and identity. To contextualize this, Sartre talks about *Pre-reflective cogito*, which he differentiates from *reflective cogito*, which, according to him, is a consciousness that posits a consciousness. The pre-reflective cogito is an unreflected consciousness. This means that while being directly aware of an object, we are not explicitly aware of ourselves acting on that object. For instance, when we are reading a book, we are aware of the book that we are holding in our hands but are not aware of our reading it. There is no subject in this activity. Unreflected consciousness is directed upon the object of awareness and not upon the self being aware of an object.

Sartre differentiates it from reflective cogito. Here, the ego or the *I* does not appear in our experience until we reflect upon a prior intention. This is to say that whenever *I have* consciousness of an object, *I* indeed make a reflective judgment on a prior act of direct, unreflective awareness of that object by a body-subject. *I* am in a position of an outside viewer when *I* retrospectively become aware of the unreflective act of the body-subject. Sartre emphasizes the concept of the body-subject as "the center of actions" and as a "substitute" for the *I*-concept. He claims that the body is the illusory fulfilment of the *I*-concept. Sartre thinks that the body-subject blocks the way for an immaterial person-substance as the subject. According to him, the ego or the *me* exists only as a pattern of acts (carried out by the body-subject) and not as a subject.

In relation to Sartre's notion of reflection as an existential-phenomenological practice, reflective practitioners acknowledge that the researcher is an active participant in the research process, therefore it is essential to 'locate' the researcher within a constellation of influential factors internal and external to the 'self'. However, there is a thin line that separates reflection and reflexivity.

Specifically, regarding research, Finlay (2002), for instance, notes how the move from reflection to self-reflective awareness involves shifting our understanding of data collection from something that can be accomplished with detached objectivity to recognizing we actively construct knowledge. In comparison with the reflective cogito when the *I* posits consciousness as an object of consciousness, reflexivity implies that one becomes aware of the active role he or she plays in meaning construction, and one sees how influential unquestioned assumptions and unrecognized aspects of context (such as culture) can be. In this conception, reflexivity becomes possible only when one is able to consciously reflect upon the active role of self in the construction of meaning. In relation to identity politics, categorization and block thinking, as Taylor (1994) posited, may be prevented, as the individual consciousness, through reflexivity, is heard and given prime importance, therefore, diminishing the possibility for dominant power (whether the teacher in the classroom, or a group influencing the majority) to stereotype or misrecognize the other.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to further build my claim, I shall provide a reflexive account of my lived experiences both as a full-time university lecturer, and as a then-student, accounting my past experiences as undergraduate student. Specifically, this section will be a criticism of the traditional instruction paradigm using reflexivity as a research method, through the lens of the existential phenomenology of Jean Paul Sartre. It is also through phenomenology that one's self is heard, accounted and deemed important, which is in the very heart of Charles Taylor's discussion on identity and the politics of recognition. Thus, my choice of method in writing this paper should be able to reflect what I believe is the core of multiculturalism – an authentic self in a pluralistic space. Drawing from reflexivity as shared relationship of the subject and the researcher, I would like to make my own connections, as a co-constructor of meaning, in sketching a reflexive multicultural criticism of Philippine education, in view of my specific personal examples as the *other*.

5.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In June of 2005, I was a struggling sophomore literature student in a university in the Philippines known for being the national institution for teacher education. It was during the second year in this university where future educators will start taking specialization courses and just like the few ambitious and driven students like I was, I set my gaze on becoming an academic achiever. My very first major subject was at 7 o'clock in the morning. We met our professor, a white-haired man who had a PhD in Literature and who was also known for his published research studies, text books and lectures, as well as his very strict standards, which resembles a typical image of an expert in the field. He was teaching the majority of our specialization courses. Few times, I was sent outside of the classroom because I wasn't able to look for the reference to an assigned task he was expecting, instead, used a different text, which I believed was the same. I was told to go to the library and search the specific author because he will only accept that reference. At one instance, I knew I answered him right, but not in the words and details

he was expecting. He told me I'm not ready to be a literature major. I continued to struggle as a student and started to question choice of specialization.

Such struggle continues in the next three years. As students, we were measured by our professor's expectations, evaluations and countless classroom shaming. Years later, only eight of us graduated out of the fifteen who started taking the program. Those three years constitutes the best struggles of my college life. It is in recalling significant events during those years that this paper, and my claim that students in general experience academic othering, is inspired. I believe that those hardships trained me well in the pressures of teaching and continuous academic pursuit. However, the disparity between students like I was and the teacher in terms of power and authority remains a question. This power relations clearly show the imbalance, which Weimer (2002) critically discussed in his article, *Balance of Power*. Here, he argued that imbalance is seen when only the teacher decides on the content, time at which content is covered, structures and materials used, condition for learning, classroom policies and assessment, which is opposite of the *student-centered* approach where the students are co-creator of learning and class negotiation is practiced.

Recalling Charles Taylor's explicit point on the issue of recognition, he posits that it is not just the mere acknowledgement of an individual or a group, but an equal treatment of such in a given space of where plurality of identities co-exists (Taylor, 1994). The plurality of identities is expected to be cultivated in our classrooms. However, in the *instruction-centered* paradigm, inequality, imbalance of power, and exclusion implicated schools in the Philippines. Multicultural education, in this regard, is in the brink of a major challenge, as our age-old educational paradigm threatens the freedom and equal representation of identities it should protect. Looking back, a similar experience made me reflect on this issue.

I am as I Appear to My Teacher

"You are not a Literature major if you have not read *One Hundred Years of Solitude!*" My professor sarcastically told me while I am in the middle of presenting my report in Philippine Literature, sometime in August of 2006. For the first time, I felt very unworthy of being called a literature major. I can't recall how I emotionally survived that day. I can't even remember what led Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel to my presentation. There were no intertextual relations, no mentions, nor any thematic resemblances. All of a sudden, my professor wanted me to compare it to a novel I have never even heard of back then.

As I recall that instance, I can reflect on the shame that I felt in that incident. The shame that one experiences by being placed on the spot in public, gasping for thin air of possible answers. Probably the very same feeling others can account in the face of their teachers. After all, I am judged as a novice by an expert in the field. To problematize it further, in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, he uses shame as a concrete example. That shame reveals something about myself, but I am 'ashamed of myself as I appear to the other...I recognize that I am as the Other sees me' (Sartre, 1943) In this regard, Sartre suggests that there is a permanent tension between the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. Similarly, in a classroom where the teacher is assumed to be the authority, students are merely *other consciousness* in subjection to the judgment of the teacher. Hence, the typical student behavior is always at the mercy of how the teacher, or better yet, how the student acts in relation to how he or she thinks the teacher sees him or her. As Sartre puts it, 'this (new) being which appears *for* the other does not reside *in* the Other; I am responsible for it as is shown very well by the education system which consists in making children [ashamed of] what they are' (Sartre, 1943)

That led me to a controlled behavior of submission and compliance. I made sure that I would do as my professor please, not because I want to learn, but in subjection to how he wants us to learn. I became an *other* conforming to his teaching and learning philosophy. Being reflexive of it made me realize that the shame I experience made me more competitive to earn good grades and pass the subject, which does not really translate to learning. I come to class to earn merits, not to learn. I am as I appear to my teacher. Thus, shame is shame *of oneself before the Other*; these two structures are inseparable. But at the same time, I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being. (Sartre, 1943)

Years after, my practice as a teacher seems to be a shadow of how I was taught, conditioned and, in a way, defined, in my tertiary years – a repetition of my teacher's style; a one-size-fits-all method of teaching. In this model of learning, a student is expected to behave in a limited way. He or she cannot freely express his or her authenticity. By that, I mean one's cultural practice, gender-related expressions and talents, religious leanings, and individually-differentiated skills. There is no room for plurality in a one-size-fits-all paradigm of education that only compels learners to conformity with the teacher's dominant voice. Taylor (1991) asserts that one of the causes of identity politics, in this regard, is molding one's identity to the demands of external conformity. In his justification of locating an individual's identity in conformity with the given social space, he said that 'our self [definition] is, to a large extent, dependent on what we take as our proper place within the dialogical relations' (Taylor, 1991: 311).

In my early practice as a senior high school teacher of creative writing (2017), I regularly account students' feedbacks in an attempt at recognizing patterns in my teaching that I could improve. On these evaluations, I asked students what they liked and what they did not like about the course. With no surprise, my students' views of learning are quite consistent with what one might expect from students educated in a *teacher-centered* paradigm: grades, tests, activities, and how students feel about me as the teacher. The students did not write about what they learned, or how they were challenged to change their thinking, or how better prepared they were for future college courses—all outcomes-based objectives I had for the course. The consistency of the responses led me to conclude that students see school in terms of work to get out of the way, not for learning to be embraced. It also led me to a personal evaluation of my teaching strategies and classroom engagements.

Senior High School teaching turns out to be bitter-sweet for me and my students, until I moved to the university and handled college students. And my teaching practices, no matter how I was convinced of its effectivity, has later on been challenged again. This time, with adults who are more mature and democratic in their ways. I encounter students who argues, deliberately shows no interest; those who juggle with other responsibilities, and other extreme cases. At first it was a struggle of adjusting attitude, which later on turned into adjusting my strategies and the options I offer. I want my students to conform in ways I thought was conducive in effective instruction. But all of these seem to work nothing. Students continue to plead for better grades, prepare for exams they will forget afterwards, and come to class just to fill and attendance count. I ran out of options to offer. Students are not expectant of class discussions as I am not exited to come to class as well. It was a long journey before I realized that everything I did and changed are all centered on me, my strategies, my ways, my options. I never looked at students as a co-creator and partner in their learning. My desire for a controlled classroom environment has killed the freedom in them. As long as I can deliver what the course objectives and university goals expect me to deliver, I am on the right track. Worse, I think of everybody as the same. I never looked at their individual differences, their personal window to their own reality, and their unique identities. My tendency to categorize and practice block-thinking defined my oppressive pedagogy, leading me, later on to critical questions: Where are the students in the picture? Have they been reduced to a collective identity of which is often always disadvantageous towards them? Is my educational paradigm providing a space for individual students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to shape a sustainable future for them? Are individual and cultural identities preserved and given opportunities to be seen and be acknowledged in my classroom?

6.0 DISCUSSIONS

In the Philippines, classroom engagements are predominantly in instruction paradigm. This claim is anchored on the strong tradition where the teacher is seen as ‘a gift to liberate students from idiocy’ (Culala & De Leon, 2019: 37). This paradigmatic problem is central in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, 2000), which he calls *The Banking Concept* in Education. In this concept, Freire (1970, 2000) claims that, ‘knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing (p.72). Similarly, Barr & Tagg (1995) corresponds Freire’s claims by arguing that in the instruction paradigm, students are mere recipients of the knowledge transmitted to them by the teacher. Although a major reform in the Philippine Education Curriculum called *The Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum (EBEC or K-12)* was introduced in 2012 to reinforce *learner-centered* paradigm (Department of Education, 2010), a significant number of practices following the EBEC reform may still be argued as *instruction-centered*. Culala & De Leon (2019) claims that in the case of this reform, ‘the idea of identifying and setting the essential knowledge that should be learned is teacher-centric and devoid of the negotiations fundamental under the tenets of the learning paradigm’ (p.42).

On a different note, the Philippine representation of teachers, being the sacrificial, hardworking (mostly underpaid) and selfless “second-parent” to students has always been regarded as the ideal image of teachers in education, particularly in Philippine basic education, but to some extent, also in tertiary levels. I have a great deal of respect for my then-teachers and now colleagues who teach in our public and private secondary schools. The teaching they do is fraught with difficult challenges, and their work is vital to Department of Education’s (DepEd) aspiration of a *Maka-Tao, Maka-Diyos, Maka-Bayan* and *Maka-Kalikasan* (Filipino people for “For God, People, Nature, and Country”) Howbeit, despite the good intentions behind teaching, recent pedagogical studies indicate that they are *teacher-centered*, not *learner-centered* (e.g., Magno, 2011; Okabe, 2013; Cacho, 2017; Culala & De Leon, 2019). In as much as reform in curriculum is needed, a change in the teachers’ belief and teaching philosophy is also necessary.

In Freire’s (1970, 2000) *banking concept*, teachers assume students are passive, take all control, determine what will be learned, and “fill” students with pre-selected information. This gives a picture that students are solely dependent on the teacher, and there is little to no space for students to co-construct knowledge (Freire, 1970, 2000). Clearly, it is anchored on the expertise, abilities and judgment of the teacher and his/her instruction. In this educational model, the discovery of knowledge is assumed as impossible apart from the dominant voice of the teacher. In relation to that, assessment and evaluation are also predominantly *teacher-centered*. Students’ learning is judged sole by the teacher’s measure of who they are. Teaching instruction, choices of instructional materials, and other pedagogical parameters are all contingent on the teacher. Recognition of the other – the student, in this paradigm, is solely dependent on the gaze of the teacher, the *I* in the classroom. In Sartre’s (1943) existential phenomenology, he locates the *other* as a subject in the gaze of the *I*. According to him, one can be aware of his or her own existence only if other people, other conscious beings, exist, for self awareness involves awareness of a public dimension of the self. There is a ‘primary relation between my consciousness and the Other’s by which the Other must be given to me directly as a subject although in connection to me’ (Sartre, 1943).

Sartre (1943) elaborates the problem of recognition by showing the constant tension between the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. In this regard, recognition is based on how the student sees him or herself in view of the teacher. Under examination by another, we are objects deprived of our transcendence or freedom. Although the same can be true when we examine them, yet the dominant voice remains with the one who holds the power - the teacher (see Weimer, 2002; Freire, 1970, 2005; and Culala & De Leon, 2019). We, therefore, are objects for the other who has the power, hence, othering happens. This othering is embedded on Charles Taylor’s concept of recognition, calling the dominant power confining or demeaning (Taylor, 1994). According to him:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (Taylor, 1994: 98)

What is it in my college experience as a literature student that I am reflexive of in my practice as a teacher today? In the language of Sartre, I became the *Other-as-object* being defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connection with my then-professor as the *Other-as-subject* must be able to be referred to my permanent possibility of *being-seen* by him. It is in and through the revelation of my *being-as-object* for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his *being-as-subject*. This leads me to another encounter I had.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

As multiculturalism seeks the inclusion of the views and contributions of diverse members of society while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into the dominant culture, I viewed Charles Taylor’s perspectives on Identity Politics as a necessary evaluative tool in unearthing the problems in Philippine Education, primarily on the confines of instruction-paradigm. Taylor’s politics of recognition confronts what I believe is the core problem or the root of an oppressive educational practice, which is the nonrecognition and misrecognition of the individual – the student. Looking at Sartre’s existential phenomenology and Freire’s *Banking Concept* in Education parallel to the current educational situation in the Philippines, I made an argument that academic othering is common among teacher-student relations. I used my personal account in relation to other literatures on the oppressing nature of education using reflexivity as a research method. With this, I, as a Filipino university instructor claims that education in the instructional paradigm, also known as teacher-centred learning, is a form of subtle oppression, and a threat to multiculturalism and its contribution to sustainability through the suppression of one’s authentic individual identity in a pluralistic space through identity politics, the propagation of a one-size-fits-all method of instruction in an *instruction-centered* paradigm, and the problematic assumed role of teachers as ‘a gift to liberate students from idiocy’ (Culala & De Leon, 2019: 37)

In today’s Philippine Education, the goal to preserve individual and collective cultural diversity remains challenged despite curricular reforms, because of identity politics or the politics of recognition in the classrooms. This problem continues to thrive in the instruction paradigm of education, which neglects the value of individual and cultural recognition, as deemed necessary by Charles Taylor’s (1991, 1994) study on multiculturalism. It is my plea as a researcher and educational practitioner to dig what I believe is the very root of oppression, so as multicultural education may flourish in the Philippines.

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