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DepEd pushes for the use of Mother Tongue to develop better learners

In an elementary school in Ilocos Norte, the teacher asked her pupils to describe an earthen jar during a social studies class. A blank stare from across the classroom greeted her. Sensing that she was not fully understood, she said the word *burnay* and the class was stirred back to life as the pupils started to generate a lot of images about the subject matter. Soon, the classroom was alive with students wanting to take part in the discussion about *burnay*.

“When a child thinks, he naturally uses the language he grew up with. That is why the thinking process is fast and clear. But imagine if an Ilocano child has to first translate a Filipino or an English word, the thinking process is not as fluid, said Department of Education Undersecretary Vilma Labrador.”

This is the reason why the Department of Education issued Department Order 74 in July 2009 which institutionalized the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), convinced by overwhelming evidence which showed that the use of mother tongue in early education develops better and faster learners.

“Our goal here is to develop lifelong learners who are proficient in the use of their first language, the national language and other languages, said Education Secretary Mona Valisno.

The Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education project is a continuation of the Lingua Franca Education Project launched in SY 1999-2000 as mandated by DECS Memo No. 144 s. 1999.

“We know of many teachers who translate Science lessons in Tagalog so that students can better understand the concepts,” Labrador pointed out. For young learners, it is easier for them to understand why water boils and why it turns into ice when subjected to varying temperature using the language they use at home,” she added.

DepEd said the use of mother tongue from pre-school to grade three is called bridge program because the mother tongue or first language of the learner is being used as a bridge to learn a second or third language, like Filipino or English.

“If a child fully understands what is being talked about, he can make sense of things and participate intelligently in discussions because a familiar language is used, thus, his thinking process is unencumbered,” Labrador explained.

Director Paraluman Giron of DepEd Region IV-A and another strong advocate of MTB-MLE said mother tongue-based education should cover both the teaching **of** and the teaching **through** of the child’s first language.

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“It is not enough that we teach the mother tongue particularly in the early years but we use it in teaching other subjects which are equally rich ground for developing higher order thinking skills among our young learners. The question like “Bakit nawawala ang “bakit” pag ang bata ay nasa paaralan na?” can be answered by using the mother tongue in the classroom,” Giron expounded.

Educators believe that If a child cannot fully express himself, he is inhibited to ask more why’s and tend to just keep quiet or just agree with what the teacher says.

Notable international studies (Thomas and Collier) and local studies (The Lubuagan Project) clearly showed the benefits to children who are educated under a MTB-MLE method and pedagogy.

Director Yolanda Quijano of DepEd’s Bureau of Elementary Education confirmed that based on studies the use of mother tongue in learning allows students to learn, read and write more quickly. She added that learners learn a second and a third language more quickly when learning is first conducted in their first language.

“These studies proved that learners who begin in their first language have more efficient cognitive development and are better prepared for more cognitively demanding subject matter. In other words, a learner tends to be smarter if he starts his education using the mother tongue” Quijano stressed.

Thus, DepEd continues to invest in training teachers in mother tongue-based multilingual education where it has already trained an initial 53 teachers in Grades 1, 2 and 3. The teachers who were selected based on their proficiency in their students’ mother tongue, Filipino and English came from Luzon and the Visayas.

DepEd provided teachers with clear understanding of the principles and practices as well as their roles and responsibilities in the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education.

DepEd has partnered with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Teacher Education Institutions, *Talaytayan*, Inc., a non-government organization, and the Translators Association of the Philippines for a stronger institutional support in implementing MTB-MLE.

At present there are 104 schools nationwide implementing MTB MLE in the 60 DepEd divisions of the country’s 16 regions. Eight major languages as mother tongue are being used for instruction. These are Tagalog, Ilokano, Pangasinense, Kapampangan, Bicolano, Waray, Cebuano and Hiligaynon.

Recently, a newspaper reported that students in Titulok Elementary School in Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao have lost interest in going to school because they are taught in a language they do not understand. Speaking mostly in *T’boli* and *Ilonggo*, the schoolchildren, the report said, have started to troop back to school as their teachers began teaching lessons in *Ilonggo*, their native

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tongue. Thanks to Save the Children- Philippines which introduced the mother tongue multilingual education in the area.

“With more than 150 dialects or first language spoken by learners all over the country, we really welcome non-government organizations who want to pitch in to make education truly inclusive especially in multi-lingual education,” Valisno said.

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