

THE AFFLIP PHILOSOPHY

AUSTRALIAN FOUNDATION FOR
FOSTERING LEARNING IN THE
PHILIPPINES (AFFLIP)

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AFFLIP

Incorporated in 2011, AFFLIP is a voluntary, non-government, not for profit Foundation based in South Australia with DGR status, which contributes to the educational development of young people living in some of the poorest areas of the Philippines. At present its work is located in Davao City in the southern Philippines.

OBJECTS

The Foundation's objects are:

- the provision of physical facilities and learning resources for identified schools in the Philippines;
- the planning and delivery of professional development programs for Filipino teachers and administrators;
- the development of greater global awareness for students and teachers in identified schools in the Philippines and in South Australia through mutual exchange;
- school communities in their efforts to reduce student hunger, illness, infections and malnourishment in identified Filipino schools;
- students from poor families to attend school and access both formal and extracurricular school programs.

I. THE PURPOSE OF AFFLIP

“*The Australian Foundation for Fostering Learning in the Philippines (AFFLIP) is a voluntary, non-government, not-for-profit Foundation based in South Australia, which seeks to make a contribution to the educational development of young people living in some of the poorest areas of the Philippines. At present its work is located in Mindanao in the southern Philippines.*”

AFFLIP’s focus is on learning, and so its various programs involve fundraising to contribute physical facilities and learning resources for schools, promoting learning in and through the outdoor environment, providing scholarships for students from impoverished backgrounds, initiating activities which promote the health and nutrition of students, twinning Filipino public schools with public schools in South Australia, and supporting the professional development of teachers in such areas as literacy and numeracy.

The work of AFFLIP is informed by a set of principles derived from its philosophical beliefs about the role of a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) based in an affluent country whose purpose it is to assist educational development in a less affluent country. This paper outlines the principles and their rationale.



II. THE RATIONALE FOR AFFLIP

Principle 1: *Education is central to the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural health of any society.*

The Board and members of AFFLIP are people who are committed to the belief that education is one of the most important ways by which any society can ensure that it functions effectively as a democracy, develops economically and provides opportunities for its citizens to live full and productive lives. This is because education is the major public site for the development of the capabilities of its people as citizens, workers and family and community members.

Principle 2: *That in a globalising world, people in affluent countries have a responsibility to contribute to the development of less advantaged countries. Education should be a central focus of these efforts.*

There are many countries in the world which are affected by the ravages of such issues as poverty, illiteracy, internal conflict, war, lack of respect for the rule of law, disease and environmental destruction. The issues in these countries are caused by a range of historical, material and human factors, but they are not matters whose impact is confined to the boundaries of nation-states. In an increasingly interdependent world, human suffering and instability affect all of humanity. Apart from the moral obligation to alleviate the suffering of fellow human beings, recent research demonstrates that the maintenance of vast disparities in standards of living within and between nations across the world are a major cause of instability, a fact which affects wealthy as well as poor nations. It follows that it is the responsibility of people in affluent countries to contribute human and material resources in a combined global effort to address these issues in areas where they are most prominent. Given its importance (see Principle 1 above), it is clear that education should be a key focus of the contributions made by affluent countries.

Principle 3: *That the scale of development work needed in the world means that the task cannot be left solely to governments. CSOs have an important role to play in providing assistance to people in developing countries and in building a global civil society.*

The bulk of the responsibility for providing aid to developing countries lies with governments. However, the scale of the issues to be addressed is such that the task cannot be left solely to governments. Just as there are volunteer-based civil society organisations (CSOs) which work within nation-states to address a number of social issues, so too do volunteer organisations need to operate in a global civil society. When they do, CSOs can take many forms. For example, a CSO might have members from a number of nation-states and work in many countries or, like AFFLIP, it might have its home in one country (Australia) and do its work in another (the Philippines). And it can also work in a range of ways, including individually, in tandem with governments and other CSOs, or both. A CSO which works across the boundaries of nation-states is not only contributing to a chosen area of focus such as education, but is also engaged in the important task of helping to build a global civil society.



III. WHY THE PHILIPPINES AND WHY MINDANAO?

Given Principles 1-3, the question for people who want to assist others in less fortunate circumstances than themselves is how and where to make their contribution. The simple answer is that the extent of such factors as poverty, illiteracy and disease in the world means that there are many places to choose from. So why the Philippines? AFFLIP Board members decided to focus on the Philippines for two major reasons. First, the Philippines lies in the bottom half of the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) which is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living for countries worldwide. Second, there have been and continue to be strong economic and cultural ties between the Philippines and Australia, and specifically South Australia.

Principle 4: *That AFFLIP should focus its work on a small group of disadvantaged neighbouring schools in a severely disadvantaged part of the Philippines.*

Having chosen the Philippines, our next decision was to form a CSO which would make its central aim the enhancement of education in the Philippines - an aspiration which we tried to capture in its name: the Australian Foundation for Fostering Learning in the Philippines (AFFLIP). Our intention was that AFFLIP would work with other CSOs to advance this aim.

However, we were still unclear about where AFFLIP might focus its attention in the first instance. Our research demonstrated that some of the 18 regions in the Philippines fall well below the HDI measure for the Philippines as a whole, and the lowest of these is Mindanao with 17 out of its 24 provinces falling into the bottom half of the national HDI list. Indeed, 9 of the bottom 10 provinces in the Philippines are in Mindanao. The extent of disadvantage in Mindanao made it an obvious choice for the focus of AFFLIP's work.

Mindanao is the second largest island in the Philippines and has a population of 21 million. There are over 15,000 schools in Mindanao and clearly it would be impossible for a fledging Foundation to have an impact on such a vast schooling system. We decided against the idea of simply selecting the most disadvantaged schools across Mindanao because individualizing schools in this way is inconsistent with our educational philosophy. In particular we wanted to work with a group of schools which had formed, or had the potential to form, a collaborative network sharing resources and innovative ideas. We believe that such an approach as well as being more practical is more likely to foster sustainability than support for stand-alone schools. More than this, we could see that eventually a small group of cooperating schools could become a hub for incubating innovative approaches that could be adapted for use in other parts of the Philippines.



The next task was to select a group of schools. Here pragmatism took over. In 2011, our education contacts[1] based in Davao City in the DepEd were asked to nominate a School District comprising schools which (a) are disadvantaged in terms of resources; and (b) wanted to work with a Foundation like AFFLIP to enhance student learning outcomes. They nominated the Talomo District, located on the southern edge of Davao City and comprising 15 elementary schools with over 20,000 students. AFFLIP has worked with the Talomo District ever since.

IV. WHAT IS AFFLIP'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY?

Principle 5: That AFFLIP's educational approach should be holistic and aim to contribute to a range of facilities, resources, programs, and activities which develop the capabilities of each child necessary for living a full and productive life.

As expressed in Principle 1, AFFLIP is based upon the premise that education is the key to improving the quality of life of societies around the world. The Foundation's understanding of the concept of 'quality of life' includes not only personal health and well-being but also the social, economic, political, environmental, and cultural aspects of life. Given this broad conception of the role of education, AFFLIP has adopted a holistic educational philosophy which places the development of capabilities to enable young people to live fulfilling and productive lives at its heart.

The adoption of this philosophical approach has implications for the focus and the processes of AFFLIP. It means for example, that it rejects an approach which has a sole focus on, say, physical resources such as buildings. There is little point in contributing facilities or resources which can't be used if, for example, considerable professional development is needed to activate their use. Rather, AFFLIP identifies needs in ways consistent with Principle 8 below, and provides support spanning three broad areas:

- **Student well-being** – resources and activities which promote student physical and emotional well-being such as a contribution to addressing malnourishment through, for example, funding the establishment and running of school vegetable gardens; providing scholarships for the most impoverished students to help them develop the wherewithal to remain in school; and school medical resources and facilities (e.g., first aid kits).
- **Curriculum** – resources and activities which promote learning such as curriculum materials; staff professional development especially related to pedagogy, curriculum content and educational leadership; twinning with South Australian schools to foster mutual learning between students and teachers in vastly different cultures and contexts; learning in and through the outdoor environment; and on-line and face-to-face learning exchanges between teachers in South Australia and Mindanao.
- **Physical infrastructure and resources** – small infrastructure projects such as reading stations, implements and technologies for vegetable gardens, outdoor play equipment, and digital technologies.

AFFLIP's current portfolios are organised around aspects of one of more of these three areas.

[1] A number of the early (and current) AFFLIP Board members had experience in Davao through their work in a major AusAid education project. The strong relationships they formed with Filipino educators at all levels of the DepEd undoubtedly supported the establishment and subsequent operation of AFFLIP.



V. WHAT IS AFFLIP'S APPROACH TO INFLUENCING SYSTEM-WIDE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE?

Principle 6: That AFFLIP's work should contribute to educational change in other parts of the Philippines through an approach which involves bringing to scale successful innovations in Talomo District schools.

Apart from working with the fifteen Talomo District schools on a range of aspects of education which are of importance to them, the Talomo schools are also seen as sites of educational innovation which focus on the sorts of big issues, problems and dilemmas facing educationally disadvantaged schools in the Philippines. The aim is to develop, trial and research innovative approaches to teaching and the curriculum – not simply to benefit the Talomo District schools involved, but, using the resources of the DepEd, to bring these innovations to scale by spreading them through the public education system in the Philippines and beyond.

There are a number of features of this approach to 'scaling up' some aspects of AFFLIP's work with the Talomo District schools to other parts of the Philippines and beyond which should be noted. These include:

- **Innovation:** That any activities/strategies that are scaled up should be innovative – that is, they should add value to what is being done in Filipino schools, not do the work that the government should be doing through its DepEd;
- **Incubating ideas:** That the Talomo District is seen as a site of educational innovation – the incubator of approaches and strategies that might be taken up elsewhere;
- **Research and evaluation:** That any innovation is researched/evaluated to determine the extent of its impact, and to reveal any strengths and weaknesses which are noted when the innovation is taken up by schools outside the Talomo District;
- **Documentation:** That before taking it outside the Talomo District, the innovation is fully documented (including such matters as theory, design, practice, impact, and evaluation) so that there is a resource available for use elsewhere;
- **Dissemination:** That the 'scaling up' of an innovation involves dissemination through one or more avenues, viz.,
 - the DepEd (AFFLIP ensures that any innovation is taken up by other schools on a voluntary basis, not mandated or standardized);
 - other civil society organisations in the Philippines or other parts of the world;
 - AFFLIP 'chapters' located in other parts of Australia and working with other Districts in the Philippines (the idea of independent units as part of a broader AFFLIP federation[2])
- **Context:** That the process of 'scaling up' recognizes that the detail of educational change is context specific, and so should not be transferred or imitated, but rather interpreted and tested to suit the circumstances and culture of the new setting.

[2] It should be noted that at the time of writing (December 2020) these avenues for dissemination of innovative practices are being explored and have not yet been realised.



VI. WHAT IS AFFLIP'S OPERATIONAL PHILOSOPHY?

There are six principles which underpin AFFLIP's operational processes.

Principle 7: *That where possible and appropriate, AFFLIP should identify and work with other bodies, groups or agencies whose aim it is, directly or indirectly, to foster learning in the Philippines.*

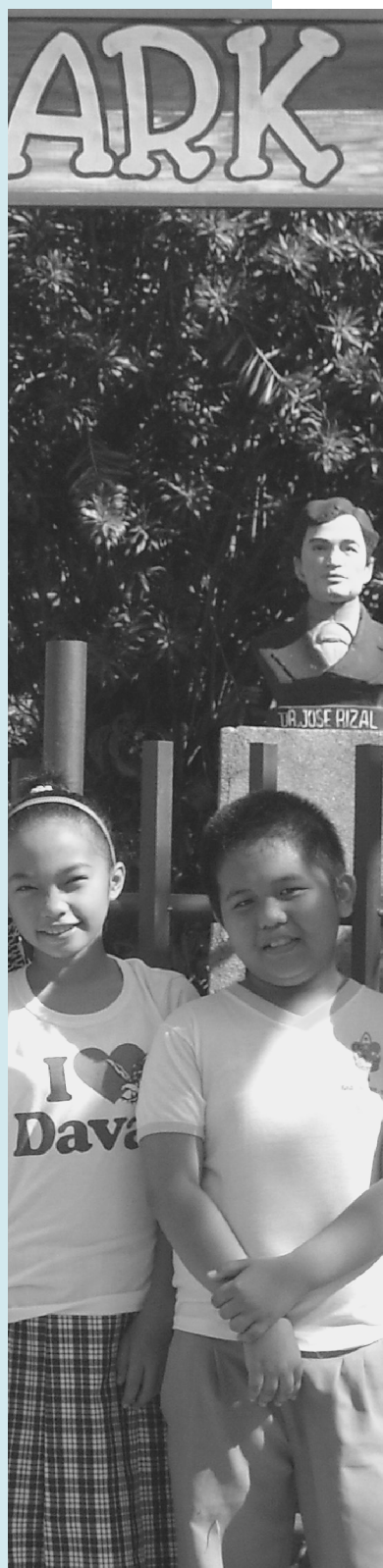
As in any society, there are a number of groups, bodies and programs directly or indirectly working towards promoting learning in the Philippines. These include government agencies such as the Philippines Department of Education and its Regional, Divisional and District based structures; overseas government aid programs such as DFAT; aid activities run through the United Nations; and world-wide non-government organisations. In addition, there are business organisations which direct sponsorships or donations to AFFLIP programs as a part of their corporate social responsibility. AFFLIP identifies which organisations are working in this way in the Philippines, and specifically Mindanao, and the types of programs and activities that are in place. This allows AFFLIP to work not only with other groups where appropriate (including dissemination of educational innovations, applying for funds etc.) but also to ensure that its activities are not inconsistent with, or counterproductive to, these efforts.

Principle 8: *That there must be an equal relationship between AFFLIP and the schools with which it is working where both parties have agency. The structures and processes of AFFLIP should be consistent with this principle.*

AFFLIP rejects any approach which constructs a hierarchical relationship between itself and the schools with which it is working, or which is based on a patronising 'helping hand' philosophy. Rather it sees itself and schools in the Philippines as collaborating partners working together to foster learning.

One structural way in which this is represented is through the interaction between AFFLIP and groups of educators based in the Talomo District who comprise Technical Working Groups (TWGs), each of which correspond to AFFLIP's educational portfolios. Both parties work together on problems and issues. For example, each year the schools identify their perceived needs in one or more of the areas of curriculum, resources, or student well-being. These are aggregated by the relevant TWG and then evaluated by the AFFLIP Board in relation to a number of factors including the extent and type of resources needed, the completion of previous projects, the outcomes and evaluation methods to be used, and the overall contribution that the achievement of the identified needs will make to fostering learning.

The AFFLIP Board's appraisal – sometimes conducted on-line, sometimes face to face during the annual evaluation visit by Board members - then forms the basis of a discussion with the relevant TWG and individual schools, prior to the negotiation of an agreed plan for the year. In this way, the schools are not mendicants of AFFLIP, nor does AFFLIP simply carry out the wishes of the schools without question.



Principle 9: *That it is important to ensure that AFFLIP's activities and programs will promote sustainability rather than dependence, and innovation rather than repetition.*

Some of AFFLIP's activities will be directed towards providing basic resources which are needed to address issues at a specific time. However, although this is an important role for the Foundation, one of the dangers for any CSO is for its activities to always focus on short term and urgent needs and so unwittingly foster a culture of dependency. AFFLIP avoids falling into this trap by developing programs and running activities which have short, medium and long term outcomes.

Thus, an important criterion against which activities (other than basic and urgent resource provision) are judged is the extent to which they foster sustainability so that when AFFLIP shifts its focus, the activities can continue without the Foundation's support. This means ensuring that local educators have the skills to continue the activity and/or have access to the resources necessary for its maintenance.

In order to address many of the issues facing educators in the Philippines, AFFLIP also strives to make its programs innovative. This means rather than providing support for traditional approaches, AFFLIP works with Filipino educators on developing new ways to solve entrenched problems or issues.

Apart from this approach serving the needs of the schools involved, it also charts a way forward for education in other parts of the Philippines and Asia. In this way, AFFLIP's work extends beyond the immediate school sites in which the projects are developed and implemented. Indeed, these sites become innovation hubs, trialing and evaluating new approaches which can be picked up elsewhere.

Principle 10: *That AFFLIP's activities will contribute to community building.*

Another aspect of sustainability is the extent to which an activity is connected with the local community. There are a number of ways in which AFFLIP plans with and through local communities and so promotes the powerful idea that education not only belongs to the community but is central to community building.

Principle 11: *That AFFLIP should employ processes which guard against cultural imperialism in its programs and activities.*

A danger for a CSO based in one culture and working in another is to engage unwittingly in a form of cultural imperialism by carrying across values and processes that are culturally inappropriate. For example, curriculum resources and materials that are designed for the Australian context may, for various cultural reasons, be unsuitable in the Philippines context; or ways of working with teachers may clash with accepted protocols of the Filipinos. AFFLIP works hard to guard against this danger. Its various programs start from a deep respect for and appreciation of the cultures, traditions, and histories of the Filipino people, and AFFLIP Board members are always working to extend their understanding of these. In addition, extensive consultation with relevant TWGs and the School Heads' group seeks to ensure that AFFLIP sponsored activities and programs will enrich Filipino students' cultural and inter-cultural understandings.

VII. TRANSLATING THE PHILOSOPHY INTO ACTION

AFFLIP's philosophy is evolving as refinements are made on the basis of our experiences. Currently our educational portfolios are:

- Professional Development: Literacy
- Schools Learning Network
- Health and Nutrition
- Scholarships
- Learning through the Outdoor Environment

