

What's the impact of your school programs?

If students get report cards and progress reports at the end of the school year, how do schools similarly evaluate their programs? There is the well-regarded accreditation agency, the Philippine Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities, with its comprehensive school visits every five years, but what about the more immediate need to gauge the impact of newly minted programs?

This issue came to mind after reading what Teach for the Philippines (TFP) headed by cofounder and CEO Clarissa Delgado embarked on along with operations team members Patricia Feria-Lim and Mavie Ungco. In 2015-2016, TFP on its fifth year began working with Prof. Leigh Linden, an affiliate of the US-based MIT Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, to design and implement a pilot impact evaluation of its program at one of its 29 placement schools in partnership with 17 local governments nationwide. Numancia Central Elementary School in Siargao, Surigao del Norte, was the chosen site of the survey. This was a pilot for a more comprehensive impact survey in the years to come.

Students in Grades 4-6 were randomly assigned to classroom sections in which they might have a TFP teacher-fellow for science instruction, English instruction, or none at all. A total of 386 students participated in the study.

This was an important survey to determine the impact of the TFP program. The official final report was received in October last year. The principal finding: that TFP has had a positive significant impact on student achievement based on end-of-year test scores.

Another interesting finding is that TFP

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seems to benefit students from families with a monthly income of P5,000-P10,000. This compels TFP to understand better how to serve those with a monthly income of P5,000. This benchmark figure was chosen because more than half of the students come from families earning less. The results showed that TFP benefited students from comparatively less poor families rather than those from the lowest income group, which had lower attendance rates.

One drawback to better understanding this finding is the inconsistency of the attendance data, especially since attendance records are often reported by student monitors. Another drawback is the lack of biometrics data (age, weight, etc.) prior to the study, especially in the light of a World Bank report citing the understudied effect of malnutrition and stunting on developmental and educational cycles. It behooves TFP to consider these factors in its planned large-scale survey in the future.

While the results are encouraging, it

needs to be pointed out that the study involved only one elementary school in one municipality, and student experience with just three TFP teacher-fellows. It is a given that results will be different in other regions and school setups.

That TFP makes it its business to know and measure its effectiveness speaks of its long-term visioning and seriousness of purpose. This is a practice that schools need to weave into their annual plans.

TFP's current trustees, all strong advocates of excellent and equitable public school education, are: cofounders Lizzie

Zobel de Ayala, Margarita Delgado and Clarissa Delgado, Kirsten Suarez-Quintos, Leslie Anne Cruz, Timi Gomez-Aquino, Lisa Gokongwei-Cheng, Piki Lopez, Chito Sta. Romana, Cecile Dominguez-Yujuico, Fr. Johnny Chupeco Go, SJ, and Patricia Feria-Lim. (Disclosure: I was a longtime TFP trustee.)

The recent news that the Senate plans to initiate an inquiry into and evaluation of the entire Philippine educational system from preschool to higher education is noteworthy. This was prompted by news of how shamefully the Philippines has fared in international school rankings, or even in comparison with our Asean neighbors. But the Philippines' poor ratings have not exactly been a secret, so why this sudden sense of urgency? Will a Senate inquiry truly lead to meaningful reforms? Yet one must not lose hope, for at the very least education will be on center stage and engage the public in meaningful conversations.

* STUDENTS

* SCHOOL