

Imagining Cool School

By Joey Ayala, slightly revised from a 2010 writing project called “Cool Book”

In the light of Climate Change, what would Cool School be like?

First of all we need to see formal education and schooling as a **deliberate attempt at culture-building**. This may be a paradigm-shift challenge for educators to successfully parallel the political, scientific, and economic efforts to cool the planet.

Schools are still largely in a demand-driven industrial mode where Graduates are imbued with knowledge, values, and skills - “products” fashioned to be “globally-competitive.” Curricula are mostly handed downwards from authority rather than developed upwards from communities. Curriculum development tends to be subjugated to governmental readings of labor market demands and First World-like aspirations rather than to the demands of the development of the humane global village that Planet Greenhouse’s physical characteristics suggest. Meanwhile, by the time schools re-tool to “meet global demand” for certain skills, that demand has already changed!

The General Direction for Cool Education

Cool education is truer to the original meaning of the word.

Wikipedia: Etymologically the word education contains educare (Latin) “bring up”, which is related to educere “bring out”, “bring forth what is within”, “bring out potential” and ducere, “to lead”.

The cool direction of education is *loob-palabas*¹. From the inside to the outside. To paraphrase Maria Montessori²: the work of children is to contact reality, producing an adult in the process; the work of adults is to transcend reality (and, may I add, to do so while keep the child-within alive in the process).

Educate for systemic thinking, creativity and whole-ness. Go heavy on project -driven and student-led activities. Drill skills by engaging people in meaningful, relevant and/or enjoyable work that, if possible, has positive impact in the home: real home-work. The only way we can be “nationalistic” is to show how we are valuable at home. All of our Climate Change and educational concern should manifest in the home-community.

¹ From the inside, going out. More detail in a downloadable file of *SiningBayan: The Art of Nation-Building*, at <https://www.joeyayala.online/>

² Maria Montessori (August 31, 1870 – May 6, 1952), Italian physician-educator-philosopher whose work is highly-influential especially in the field of early childhood education.

Supply-driven Curricula in a Cool School would take advantage of our natural cultural strengths. If you look at the occupations of Filipinos abroad³ you will see that our overwhelming natural value to the foreign employer is our High Touch⁴ - “the ability to empathize with others, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the mundane in pursuit of purpose and meaning.”⁵ We have a natural, sustainable supply of something foreign employers need – our high-touch, high-empathy culture. We are domestic helpers, caregivers, mail-order brides, nurses, doctors, teachers, entertainers, therapists....

In a sense it makes more economic sense to export people who will keep on remitting foreign exchange than to export non-renewable resources like mineral ore. The downside is families torn apart, but apparently we can live with this, and have been living with this for quite a while – migration within our archipelago pre-dates air travel. On this point it’s either we develop a conscious socio-legal mechanism such as divorce to make the single- or no-parent family less disturbing OR work towards an economic system that lowers the pressure to migrate for work.

While overseas workers are economically valuable as a bridge to a better collective future, educators might do well to postulate that **people are valuable as people in a dynamic local community**, not just as providers of legal tender who are pressed into giving up family in exchange for a medium of exchange to keep others alive so that they can go to school... and so on and so forth.

Can school be a cool antidote for divorce and social dysfunction? A Cool School would provide the spawning ground and equipping laboratory that will send the “Talentadong Pinoy” out to the world, no longer as “high value but lower cost” individuals but as efficient, productive, highly skilled and **highly organized corporate action units that integrate work with family.**

Export families and competitive cool corporations, not individuals. Look at how missionary families from developed countries thrive and prosper in third world countries and realize that the reverse can be true! Cool School would teach the right budgeting and organizing skills to make it happen! *Sarili-Kapwa-Kabuoan*. **Cool Schools would help us colonize the rest of the world with our Bayanihan spirit.**

A global cooling curriculum would dignify and deepen the natural strengths, skills and talents that go into these inevitable employments of our people. Evolve local curricula and teaching strategies. Bring into the faculty local masters and artisans and artists. Acknowledge and dignify them, let them share what they know. They may not

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_Filipino

⁴ *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*. By Daniel Pink.

⁵ <http://www.leftlanedesigns.com/blog/why-right-brainers-will-rule-the-future/>

have teaching degrees but they have something to share and are undervalued as culture-bearers.

This would strengthen medical/health eco-tourism and lay the grounds for a systematic, well-branded and positioned global care-giving industry hot on the heels of an aging baby-boomer market.

Demand-driven Curricula in a Cool School implies that we are in competition with other “suppliers” of labor for work that can be done via computers, the World Wide Web and electronic media. This is easy enough to see –work exists for computer-literates and for those who speak, or learn to speak, a language other than their native one, and this implies that the competition for this outsourced work is global in nature.

What may not be so easy to see and quantify is the **domestic demand for skills that, when employed, will create domestic prosperity and general well-being.** In a sense, the domestic demand is for people who can operationalize *Bayanihan*.

A Cool School would aid in sustainable development by helping the emergence of creative adults with a high awareness and appreciation of self, of community and of practical systems and competent action.

A Cool School physical environment would hew closely to green ideas in terms of design and materials. One of the design objectives would be **to provide a model for green homes.** It would showcase to the community what they could do with their own homes using **accessible and appropriate materials and designs.** The school structure itself would be a lesson. Since school naturally plays a major role as shelter in times of disaster, it would be designed with this in mind.

Cool School Proximity - Educator housing would be close to the formal learning grounds. Ideally, all students would be within walking distance of home, with the route liberally planted to communal vegetables and fruit trees.

Size and Quantity - Cool School would be small but numerous and judiciously spread out. Recent psychological studies suggest that 150 people is an optimum group number in the sense of building deep and long-lasting relationships. Spreading out competent learning facilities would help decongest population centers. How small can a school get? Believe it or not, there is a one-student school in Cuba! (I found this school at http://www.hellocuba.ca/castro_education.php --- but when I went back to review the link, it was gone!).

The political environment of schools is, by default, totalitarian/authoritarian. To evolve a culture of *Bayanihan*, schools need to be run as a communal concern. Encourage peer-teaching. Make teachers learn and teach each other’s subjects to keep them in the learning zone. This will lead to inter-disciplinary enrichment and will foment integrative innovation. Release educators from repetitive administrative compliances so they have more time and energy to learn new things to keep their work fresh and relevant. If

teachers themselves aren't excited about their lessons, students will notice and follow suit. If teachers aren't creative, they will kill their students' natural creativity. If teachers spoon-feed their students and don't give them a chance to lead, to challenge conventions, to investigate and decide routes of action for themselves, then our society will eventually follow suit, waiting to be served, waiting to be ordered, waiting for jobs and bosses.

Bottom-up or periphery-to-center socio-political energy is necessary for running climate-related programs, and Cool School would drill these energies.

The economic environment of a Cool School would promote and model local economy and circulation of wealth and value. It would consider farm produce for a communal kitchen and maintenance labor in lieu of cash. It would encourage the development of high-value, high-local-content goods and services designed for the school community. It would experiment with cooperative systems and closed-circuit (exclusive-local) economy with students, parents and teachers where "school-issued money" can be earned and spent within the school and community context. This approach resonates with the thinking needed for executing climate-related programs.

The cultural environment dignifies the local, encourages participation, organization and integration through student-led projects and activities that radiate throughout the surrounding community. Why wait for graduation for learners to make a contribution to society? Why remove youthful energy from daily life by trapping it in past-bound education?

Some suggestions for Cool Educators in regular schools or in training people for global cooling projects

Use nature metaphors and processes to illustrate lesson modules in any subject. For example: money, like blood, needs to flow in balanced amounts to other parts of an organism to keep it healthy. Too much money accumulated in one place leads to the financial equivalents of energy blockages in the body - manifesting as economic "strokes" or "tumors". Too little leads to the withering away of the organism. Such "metaphoring" leads students, naturally, to thinking in terms of systems, flows and processes instead of fixed products, consumption and other dead-end thought vectors.

Learn the language of the students. Find out what engages them in pop culture and use that as entry point to lessons. For example, you can use the length of a popular song to learn about telling time. You can analyze the lyrics to learn about grammar and figures of speech. You can even count the syllables of a song stanza to drill counting.

Computer games, tele-series, celphones, pornography, etc. can be an educator's enemies or allies, depending on how they are treated.

Use non-linear language. Explore *salundiwa*⁶, music, drawing, movement, theater, story-telling, the electronic media, etc. Too much linear thinking has led us to the

⁶ Pang-salo ng diwa. More detail in a downloadable file of *SiningBayan: The Art of Nation-Building*, at <https://www.joeyayala.online/>

Climate Change problem – the pursuit of an ever-rising profit graph is a perfect example. We can help balance our human energy by exercising the non-linear parts of our consciousness. A curriculum that balances the linear, logical and verbal with more systemic, intuitive, and imagistic learning styles may be a remedy to the global ills caused by extreme linear-logical-verbal thinking.

Make sure students enjoy nature. No one will conserve or preserve anything they don't enjoy. The same thing goes with communal and cooperative activity. The same thing goes with math, science, language, etc. Make sure there is something enjoyable and engaging in the process and content of learning activities.

Real Home-Work. Use the home as laboratory and source of details with which to illustrate and exercise lessons. Make people aware of energy uses at home by asking questions such as “how much water do you use to bathe” or “how long does it take to cook rice.” Get students to list what things are in the home. Make them inventory the materials that went into building the home. Make them imagine things that would improve their homes and get them to try to act on these “visions of a better reality.” “Walang nagkakat, lahat nag-liligpit” lessons for example can be developed into modules to learn “Community Waste Management and Carbon Reduction Opportunities”. Such an approach integrates the lessons of math, science, language, economics, engineering, design, socio-civic life, and love. You can see how such a strategy can be adapted to any level of student, including adults (when a child does cool homework, the adults may learn as well!). And you're minimizing the additional energy costs of books and other educational aids.

Apply appropriate standards. How can a youngster whose resting heart rate is 120 beats per minute sit as still as a teacher whose heart is beating at half the speed? Too often adults apply adult standards to younger people – this results in a *labas-paloob* mentality, the kind that will run a red light when there are no police around, the kind that will forever need some form of **external authority**. You can see how this relates to the topic of governance versus self-governance. Self-governance is precisely the attitude we need to adopt to live with Climate Change. **One interesting performance indicator of student performance is the ability to teach to others what one has learned.** Teaching improves in a dramatic way the understanding and retention of lessons. If all students became teachers then we would eventually be spending less on formal education – school would be the same thing as community life.

Facilitate rather than dictate. Learn new things that excite you and share both your excitement and your learning with students. Learn from your students. Discover, value and dignify what students already know. This leads to their improved self-image and confidence, and a greater tendency to communicate and participate in projects. Open conceptual doors and point out learning resources more than provide information. Facilitate learning how to learn. Tearn (teach + learn). Again, this paves the way for climate-related global cooling work.

Practice and use some form of art (it doesn't have to be "perfect"!). When we think of "culture" we tend to think "art", and art is, indeed, the most apparent material manifestation of culture: architecture, design, food, fashion, music, dance, painting, film, etc. The doing of art actually increases creativity even if you don't consider yourself to be an artist or a creative person. Creative people, regardless of their field of work, tend to create their own employment and stimulate the employment of others.

Why is art important to human survival? Consider this: purposeful and rational thinking, by definition, ignores many aspects of the mind and, thus, of reality. Action coming from this focus and partial knowledge necessarily produces repercussions coming from the unconsidered areas. Cases in point: man-caused GreenHouse Gas build-up and its apparent effects on climate, the use of DDT and the evolution of DDT-resistant insects and the loss of insect-eaters, fast-food convenience and the rise of lifestyle diseases.

Art is one of the most natural tools of man for perceiving, handling, and "putting into the equation" those aspects of systemic reality that an inherently divisive mind tends to ignore. (Other tools for systemic perception and thinking include dreams, spiritual practice, meditation, etc.)

Particular to understanding global warming you can play with theater and assign nature roles to students – fish, ocean, sun, wind, etc. – and let them explore their inter-actions. Art allows people to experience themselves in new ways and to explore fresh perspectives. (In T. H. White's version of the Arthurian legend – The Sword in the Stone, Merlyn the magician transforms the young Arthur into various life forms. From these experiences are drawn the future king's lessons for governance and leadership.)

Take learning sabbaticals. There are many, many sources of practical techniques for cool education, if only one had the time and resources to access them. A system of mandatory sabbaticals for educators would go a long way towards keeping education fresh, relevant, and cool. If sabbaticals are still impractical they can be made partially possible by increasing peer-education activities and by rotating teaching assignments among teachers.

A common complaint of teachers is that they are often pressed to teach something they know nothing about – a common example is when Physical Education teachers are made to teach music. This can be remedied by peer-teaching among teachers themselves.

Another remedy is to ask students to teach the teacher what they already know and allow this to develop into a student-led project. Sample questions that spur *loob-palabas* learning: "How did you do that?" "Can you teach me?" "Can you do it in a better way?" "What's the value or usefulness of that?"