

EDUCATION CRUSADE: THE CHALLENGES TO LIFELONG LEARNING

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It will be a long and difficult journey.

Congressman Jose Enrique S. Garcia III filed House Bill No. 208 or *Lifelong Learning Act of 2019*. In a short explanatory note of the bill and addressing the Technical Working Group of the Joint Committees of Basic Education and Culture and Higher and Technical Education, the Second District Representative of Bataan explained the provisions of the bill and the importance of establishing “lifelong learning framework” in every city and municipality in the country to battle the problems of poverty, health and sanitation, environmental issues and peace and security.

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In the 2013 Beijing International Conference on Learning Cities, which was co-organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ministry of Education of China, and the Beijing Municipal Government, the participating countries aimed to mobilize cities to promote lifelong learning for all as a vector of equality and social justice, social cohesion, and sustainable prosperity.

The concept of a learning city was developed and defined by UNESCO as “a city which effectively mobilizes its resources in every sector to (a) promote inclusive learning from basic to higher education; (b) revitalize learning in families and communities; (c) facilitate learning for and in the workplace; (d) extend the use of modern learning technologies; (e) enhance quality and excellence in learning; and (f) foster a culture of learning throughout life. In doing so, it will enhance individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development, and cultural prosperity, and sustainable development.

UNESCO, mayors, city education executives and experts, identified comprehensive areas of focus, key features, and the possible measurements of learning cities. This will serve as a checklist of action points and compass in assessing and evaluating the learning cities targeting lifelong learning for all.

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Identifying people and agencies to perform the job of an organization is an important aspect of management; utilization of resources is another one. One of the challenges mentioned by the city in creating learning cities is the lack of resources. In any organization, educational, flat, matrix, or divisional, resources are an essential element. It fuels planning, directs people, and materializes the objectives. Resources do not only mean financial, it can also mean people

and their expertise and professionalism, tangibles like technology, facilities, infrastructure, and machinery, and the political will and commitment of the government officials involved in the process. As reported on UNESCO's website, the city has an annual budget of just 12 million US dollars to support all its operations, programs, and projects, and local financial institutions are not able to support the city's development projects due to high-interest rates.

In economics, if there are scarce resources (resources by nature are scarce), maximizing people is one of the best strategies; and Balanga City is a great strategist. It is evident in the mentioned practices, programs, and achievements how the city "staffed the right people" to perform the right job and targeted the desired results and objectives. The city can be a model for other learning cities that will be established in the country.

Once established, learning cities need to be constantly monitored and evaluated using measurable parameters set by UNESCO because the success of the program is not on the creation but on its continuous existence at all costs. Sustainability is the key. Contingency plans must also be laid down in the event that the master plan will not meet the expected results. It also needs forces outside the formal education sectors – the stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and private sectors. Their coordination and commitment are viable in providing an array of learning opportunities for the learners and building the learning city in general. After all, it takes a village to raise a child. The participation of the entire community is a must to create a healthy and sustainable learning environment for the learners.

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Technically, the political, socio-cultural, and educational landscapes of the world are changing; people must also change in the advertent phase. That is why it will now boil down to – us – citizens. The success of every program and realization of every plan begins with every citizen. Citizens create change. They are the prime movers of society. The responsiveness of the citizens in the creation of the learning cities in the Philippines is of utmost importance because no matter how persistent and committed the government officials are if the grassroots people will not cooperate, then all will fail. Let the national government make the people realize the value of having learning cities and the relevance of lifelong learners in achieving sustainable social and economic development. While doing so, the government must also provide learning opportunities to the people to develop their skills, talent, and competencies while maximizing their strengths so that they will be empowered to participate in the governance of the city. After all, every political action of the government officials is for the betterment of the people; for them to perfect their existence and to claim one's rights.

Achievements must match your needs. It is repeatedly uttered in one of my classes in EdD. Key areas and main features of learning cities such as social cohesion, economic development, cultural prosperity, inclusive education, improving governance and participation of all stakeholders, boosting resource mobilization and utilization are considered and targeted

by the city while providing best-value and quality service to the people. Clearly, Balanga City's steps, five (5) years ago, headed towards the ultimate goal of creating learning cities and making lifelong learners.

As for other cities in the country, it will be a long and difficult journey, but it will be worth it – FOR THE LEARNERS.

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