

OUT & A



LIVE AND LEARN

Teach for the Philippines' Clarissa Delgado offers her thoughts on addressing the education system's woes.

WHEN CLARISSA Delgado was six years old, her parents caught her with bags packed, heading to the airport. She says, "I told them I was going to Texas. I don't know why I chose that but I know that I wanted to see the world for myself."

At 13, she surprised her parents by taking charge of her education, presenting them such a logical plan that they had to support her decision to attend boarding school in the United States. She recalls the conversation: "Listen, I love you guys very much. But I'm studying abroad because I want a broader education—so I've applied to Philips Exeter Academy. Here is my acceptance letter. And by the way, see you later!"

Delgado reflects, "I guess I just had an inner curiosity. It was not fueled by anger or angst—I just wanted to do rather than to say. And in a sense I have always had a problem following rules. I go rogue..."

Since then, Delgado has taken other steps towards the non-traditional, working with local farmers in Ecuador between high school and college, before earning a degree in Environmental Science and Art History from the College of William and Mary near Washington, D.C.

If a belief in the power of education is what compelled this independent-minded, determined young girl to leave her home country, it is also what brought her back to the Philippines in 2009.

Delgado, now 27, initially returned to work on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Poverty Action Lab's impact assessment of the Sa Aklat Sisikat Reading Program—a decade-long project promoting functional literacy in Grade 4 public schools.

This experience and the results of the measurement both opened the door to understanding the root of the larger problem the education system was facing—teacher shortage and teacher quality—and to developing a program to alleviate the problem on a larger scale.

She explains the belief that became her guiding light: "The university I went to had a very strong ethos on education for all; that



EDUCATION FOR ALL

Clarissa at her office. Top left: Anna Alipio teaches a public school class. Opposite inset: TFP founders Clarissa Delgado and Lizzie Zobel (standing), and Milet Mendoza, Teach for Malaysia's Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, and Margarita Delgado, also a TFP founder (seated).

education is someone's right. Somewhere along the way I was confronted with a realization that what your parents do or where you come from should not determine the quality of your education."

The statistics facing Filipino children were startling: Of 100 children who enter first grade, only 65 of them will finish elementary school, and only 42 of them will finish high school. She says, "We have a really high drop out rate. They are around 33 percent in Grade 3. You are losing a third of your children before they know fully how to read and write."

And in the 2004 High School Readiness Test, out of 1.2 million examinees only 8,000 Filipino middle school students scored 75 percent or above. An astounding 99.36 percent of Filipinos entering high school do not have the skills or the knowledge required to manage the high school curriculum.

The educational system, she says, is constrained by its resources. With only 2.19 percent of GDP spent on education in 2009 (UNESCO recommends a country spend 6 percent minimum), there is simply not enough to adequately train the 510,000 Department of Education employees for the country's 22 million students. And a teacher-student ratio of at least 1-60 means its



pitch in, and actually rolling up your sleeves and doing more than just caring, doing something about it. "

Although the classroom lessons are key, the learning goes much deeper than what is written on the chalkboard. "These graduates bring the force of their educational experience into the classroom. They share their exposure, imbibing the kids with what we like to call a 'sense of possibility.' They open up the eyes of the students that if they just commit and stay in school to finish their education, the world is open to them," says Delgado.

"But no teacher will be the same individual after managing a class room of 60 children, by affecting change that you can see, that you yourself have had a part in creating. It will change you fundamentally and will stay with you whether you work in government, private sector," she continues.

"It takes a village to raise one student, one that graduates from high school with all the skills needed to find success in this life," says Delgado, TFP's COO. The foundation has partnered with the Department of Education, local government units, and other NGO's, and has received funding from a mix of corporate sponsors, multilateral agencies, government, and private individuals.

She believes the very positive response

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just not possible for children to get the individual attention they need, which often leads to frustrated students dropping out.

Delgado says it's important to understand the difference between literacy and functional literacy: "There's understanding what's being written on the board, versus just imitating the sounds. If you're unable to comprehend what it means, if you're not able to critically think, then you wouldn't see the point."

In 2012, rather than develop a new solution to combat the problem of teacher shortage, Delgado and her team decided to create a new organization, Teach for the Philippines (TFP), which is modeled on and affiliated with Teach for All, a global network of social enterprises whose theory of change has been implemented by 27 other countries. TFP's board includes co-founders Margarita Delgado and Lizzie Zobel, Roberto de Ocampo, Monique Villonco, and Lisa Gokongwei-Cheng.

By carefully recruiting the most highly educated, accomplished, and promising college graduates to spend two years teaching in the highest need public schools in the country, the program is designed to alleviate an immediate need in the short term, but to also sow the seeds of nation building and leadership development for the future.

For the launch of the pilot program in June this year, 53 teaching fellows were chosen from an extremely qualified pool of 450 applicants, both recent graduates and young professionals eager for a change from their corporate careers. Believing that every teacher becomes a mentor, a particular focus was put on those with leadership qualities, those with the ability to inspire others.

Delgado explains the big picture: "We are making these graduates sit down, experience something together and have an intelligent discussion on how to move forward, help out, how to

received from so many sectors shows that the country is ready to prioritize education and work together to solve the problem. Delgado states, "I think the time is right that the generation of today is interested in nation-building. They feel that it's safe to come out and say 'I want to get involved in making this country better.'"

This year's teacher fellows are now working with 10 elementary schools across Quezon City, helping improve the quality of education for about 226,000 children. Fellows receive the salary of a regular public school teacher (P17,000 per month plus benefits), and are given the pedagogical skills to manage a classroom and build lesson plans through an intensive two-month live-in training program run in partnership with the Ateneo de Manila University. Fellows will also receive on-going professional training and development for the two years in the program.

Fellows are sent out in groups of three to eight students per school, and though each is responsible for a classroom, they are under the supervision of a Master Teacher and school principal. TFP plans to increase the number of fellows and schools being helped each year, and will target those in both rural and urban areas.

The link between an educated population and strengthening the economy to bring the Philippines forward on the global stage is another reason that fixing the education system is an urgent need. According to Delgado, the most important thing Teach for the Philippines does is unite the most promising young leaders of the country around nation building and education again.

She says, "If you follow the string back to 'how,' you will always land on the fact that the majority of your population needs to receive at a minimum, a high quality education to be globally competitive. It's how to break out of this cycle of poverty." •