

# Learning from the Clash of Indigenous Education and Mainstream Education in the Lens of Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

This paper attempted to lay important underpinnings about the possible convergence of indigenous education into the mainstream education in the lens of sustainable development. It presented the diverging and converging aspects of indigenous education and mainstream education in connection to their directions in achieving sustainability. The paper underscored the implications of the clash of the two in the different facets of education in the context of the Philippine educational system. Although this paper can contribute a valuable and significant contribution to the literature on fusing the mainstream and indigenous education, it only represents a minute contribution in the perspective of an educator. Rather than filling the gap in the literature – a gap far too wide to fill – it is hoped that this paper may offer a platform for further research opportunities.

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## Introduction

Modernization as a form of social transformation is considered to be the most prevailing trend that changes almost all the corners of the societies all over the world when the period of industrial revolution emerged. From the simplest mode of living to the most complex and advanced landscape of the society, it cannot be denied how fast is the revolutionizing direction of modernity which interrelates all the aspects of human survival in terms of technology, economy, politics, culture and even social interactions. The enormous flow of innovations transformed the image of the world that is far more different from what is used to be. The rapidly growing quest of the powerful elite led to a wave of colonial acquisitions, which became the barometer of development. Gradually, all other countries entered and followed the steps of industrialization, one after the other. This is one thing that inculcates in the minds of the modern people. As human beings, people were indeed so overjoyed with the unstoppable products of innovations up to the present time. In fact, many are still discovering more and more as the nature of science and technology sets no boundaries, which made everything almost all possible to exist. Sad to realize, the face of the society at the present inherited this trend and everyone became too attached with all the yields of innovations. All the aspects of society are now run not just by simple machines but advanced mechanisms of technology. If this will persist, it can even totally

replace human manpower. Something that became a culture of the present generation and even became part of their living and survival.

Since modernization can be considered no terminal point, where are we now in the stage of this so-called modernization? What are the fallbacks of this modern world? These fallbacks are now being experienced. Behind all the good things that the modern world have brought to mankind like prosperity, convenience and comfort, counter problems surfaced affecting human race. History will tell us how the modern world was affected by economic gaps among nations, overpopulation, scarcity of resources, natural disasters, environmental degradation, terrorism, discrimination, communicable and chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and many more. Other countries even lagged behind other powerful nations because they can't compete with the unstoppable trend of industrialization and were held responsible to face the said problems. For these countries, aligning with modernization is the key. That this will resolve the aforementioned problems. Our country, the Philippines, is not an excuse.

How all these things made possible? How man learned to explore all these products of the modern world? It's how they were educated. Education became the most powerful instrument that made all these things possible. It is education that taught man to use his intellect to discover things and find answers to questions. It is the means where one generation transmits the wisdom, knowledge and experience to the next generation. Through education, people were trained with the skills needed in the modern industrial economy, creating manpower and sustaining its development. That's how education made industrialization sustains during its initial flourish up to now. In fact, the way of educating the children at the present time is still the same education that embraces the idea of colonization. As human minds are filled of ideas and concept of modernization, the kind of world that we have will continue to exist. But, same problems will continue to persist. But if education led man to embrace industrialization, it is also education that can find solutions to the pressing problems that the world is facing. Nations need to recalibrate the education of people into another dimension but at the same time not sacrificing the sustainable development. UNESCO Media (2008) underlined the reorientation that education will play in recognizing high regard on sustainable development as prime priority of the world functioning into the dimensions of sociocultural and economic policies.

Man must change the quality of life to survive the ever-changing world. It is the responsibility of all nations to change the quality of life for them to coexist and co-prosper. This should be done by exploring the identity of every nation through solving the problems of how human beings can be human. What kind of education do we need on this matter? Or do we have the appropriate education at the present? Since education is capable of catalyzing changes in the society, it must also change to conform to the dynamism of society.

The mainstream education that almost all nations have at the present introduces sustainable development in a worldview. It is the kind of education spread by the Western world which seeks to remold the cultural element into a new mode. Primarily, deploying western education emerged when colonization functioned impeding the transmission of knowledge in the local context, specifically the pre-colonial knowledge.

On the other hand, the context of indigenous education primarily focuses on local, ecological and seasonal contextualized truths that have been anchored in natural communities and was translated from generation to generation. The indigenous education can be best understood in terms of traditional knowledge. As cited in the work of Hammersmith (2007), he points out that the traditional knowledge of indigenous

people covers all aspects of life, which are aggregate and assembly of experiences brought through trial and error experiments by the ancestors.

This paper will try to examine and highlight in which aspects mainstream and indigenous education diverge and converge in the context of sustainable development.

### *Where do IP and ME Diverge in Achieving Sustainable Development?*

Amidst the comparison of the remarkable goals and practices of both types of education, dichotomy between these two exists. This dichotomy strengthens the idea that there is a distinction between the two and that these two have their respective directions. However, surely, this distinction is not set in stone; rather, it varies depending on the context.

In terms of the goal of these kinds of education, indigenous education aims young generation to be aware of local histories and traditions. Elders of the community assure that the knowledge and practices of the past such as rituals, oral traditions, religion, cultural practices, arts, language and basic survival in nature be handover to the generations to come. These serve as their cultural experiences which are considered to be the wealth of the tribe and are expected to be preserved and be inculcated to the young minds. They are cultural wealth that are adequate to satisfy basic needs. Sustainable development here revolves on how people should maintain what they have for the benefits of the succeeding generations.

This is far more different from the mainstream education which emphasizes cultural homogenization. Industrialization pushed the rise of mass schooling having the concept of unified educational system, which fosters national consciousness that centers on political, social and economic power. The same trend was exported and imposed all over the globe in the name of formal schooling. And once learners receive this formal schooling, they are considered to be Westernized possessing also the same attributes of almost all learners all over the world. This gradually obliterates regional differences and created a whole new way of living for people as compared during the pre-colonial regime. Sustainable development here comes on how people would be adept with the demands of the changing macroscopic world.

The second diverging factor deals with how education would be used by the learners. Indigenous education emphasizes learners' connection to nature as a form of holistic learning. For the indigents, nature is home. Learners learn in the context of the natural world. It is in this world where they would be able to practice their emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. It is therefore important that children must be taught how to take care of this nature and prevent it from degrading. Jain (2000) contends that learners should not be deprived to be free and to have learning space that nature has given them – to use their senses in knowing what earth looks like. Sustaining the environment is important to indigenous education. McGregor (2004) stressed that living in indigenous way is based on what you can give and not on what you get. People build a personal attachment with nature and the way of living is based on caring and preserving it. He further elaborates that sustaining these connections to nature is a moral and spiritual responsibility of man. Therefore, interfering with these connections threatens sustainability.

Mainstream education fosters decontextualized and intellectual learning. Unlike indigenous education which maintains a strong attachment to nature, learners in the mainstream education study the world through books and some advanced instructional learning materials. Learners rarely go outdoors and learn from it. The tendency, they end up learning even without having attachment to reality and intellectual

discernment is the main portal of learning. Sobel (2004) deduced the abstract and impersonal nature of learning having minimal or no direct application the learners.

Third, indigenous education connects children to their elders as part of their upbringing and . This is one way of sustaining the connections of the school and community where the entire indigenous community is part of children's education. Reagan (2000) affirmed this on his research that education and the upbringing of children is a communal accountability shared by all the members of the locale. A barrier between the school and the community is what makes indigenous education intimate in terms of communal relationships. Schooling of children may be brought to the community or community may interfere in the schooling of children. The former seeks indigenous schools to find different ways on how children can communicate to the community members who have proven to sustain their traditions for a longer period of time. This is what is referred to as trans-generational communication. The latter has something to do with how elders can intervene with the indigenous curriculum and school activities in order to maintain an intimate vision of keeping the culture in the education of the children.

Since mainstream education promotes education as a commodity, this education will teach them to become independent. Schooling is compulsory where preparation for adult life is determined by the nature of education one gets. Therefore social status in the society is determine by academic degrees obtained from schooling. The outcome is, the opportunities to be part of the manpower of the society also depend on one's scholastic profile. Collins (1979) coined the word "credential society" where different jobs and opportunities outlined their respective standards of qualifications for one to become a functional worker in a specific field. Professional growth and even economic productivity even became dependent on the results and success of formal schooling. In other words, learners need to become functional member of society in terms of the specific jobs that he or she will acquire in order for them to become contributors of sustainable development. The tendency, learners will have the opportunities to work even for the benefit of the other nations because of what he/she can offer.

Fourth, indigenous education promotes the use of the minority languages. Part of the cultural transmission in the indigenous education is the preservation of the vernacular languages. Schools must prevent the loss of this local language because it represents the identity of the indigent through oral and written communications as well as to their different cultural expressions such as music and dances. In a more advance society where language of English became the most commonly used language, it is a challenge among indigenous communities on how to reiterate in their generations the use of language in their community lives.

Mainstream education undermines the diversity of language. The universal approach of the mainstream education often promotes the use of solitary language that can be used by the learners in the globalized setting. More often than not, the delivery of instructions in modern education focuses in the use of English as the language of curriculum and instruction. One needs to comprehend this knowledge to completely compete in the multicultural world. There was even series of debate as to whether the use of English can be associated as the barometer among citizens of different nations around the world.

The birth of sustainable development was coined by Western ideas in which the most debatable issue that challenges its existence is the compromise of economic development with the preservation of the environment. Daly and Cobb (1989) agreed that the notion of sustainable development is described with the idea of rationalism, individualism, materialism and social hierarchy, which is what the mainstream education has been advocating. It is indeed a separation of people and nature.

In other words, the sustainable development in the indigenous worldview are found in the local wisdom that accounts for the interconnectedness of the people to their culture and to the environment. As individuals in this world pay respect to nature, they believe that sustainable development can be attained in the society as they handover it to the succeeding generations. In addition, the features of sustainable development in the mainstream education are rooted in social, political and economic aspects. In which, as individuals grow in the society, they need to become flexible and adaptable to the changes that may arise.

#### *Where do IE Converges with ME in Attaining Sustainable Development?*

Mainstream education is here to stay. But we need to preserve indigenous education. We don't just want the present indigenous education to stay where they are at the present. Because whether we deny or not, our cultural identity are best found in the nature of indigenous education. At present, we are coated with Westernized education but our identity deep within will stay in us. Can bringing out this true identity give us more opportunity for sustainable development? Can this be the answer to our pressing problems, which brought us too far from our roots? How can we recalibrate our system at the present? Probably, it is equally important to see where the two converges in terms of achieving sustainable development.

Since the very nature of the two types of education is to maintain on what is thought is crucial in the day-to-day living of individuals, both are agents in transmitting culture among the members of the community. Both would like education to be the tool on how cultures, norms, traditions and even wisdom are handover to succeeding generations though these cultures come into different perspectives. Both would like to handover a "culture" that would individuals grow and exercise their social functions in the society. Members of the society will grow and eventually die but the culture will remain and will be introduced by education as a living entity of the predecessors. Having this strong adherence to cultural transmission, these two systems of education can go hand in hand to redirect our path to sustainable development and teach it to the young learners both preserving the nature which is the tenet of indigenous education and embracing globalization which is the goal of the mainstream education.

Living based on the accepted norms of the society and high degree of morality is a common denominator of the two as well. That whatever learners do and accomplish, it should be for the welfare of the community. Both have the long tradition of concern about moral education that influence how learners act regarding the matters of right and wrong. Indigenous education has a high regard to spirituality and moral intervention as one of the roots in preserving the local wisdom. The value of life and the other creation is also being considered whenever society progresses in the view of the mainstream education. The implication of this converging aspect of IE and ME allows us to realize how the affective aspect of education is being carried out. It is therefore to good to note how people at the present use "values" in our quest to sustainable development.

The recipient of education, the learners, are both being prepared to the future and to life. It has been the very purpose of education to make peoples be qualified in exercising specific roles and functions in the society that individuals have meaningful responsibilities to play. IE and ME direct learners on what they can do in the future and how they can be part of building the community. Learners are also being prepared to socialize with other members of the society through communications and interactions. It is notable to think how meaningful it is to tell the generation of the present regarding the specific roles that they need to play for the sustainable development of the society.

### *Implications of the Clash Between IE and ME*

As emphasized in the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil “sustainable development” means development that conforms to the needs of contemporary generations without compromising the ability of the future to meet their needs as well. Furthermore, United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development emphasized the role of education in the sustainable development of nation. The objectives are to integrate the ideologies, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education. This animates changes in human behavior that will build a sustainable future in terms of environmental uprightness, economic competency and an ethical society for the present and for the future. Truly, man’s mindset towards development is one of the key factors to reorient the present generation on what else can we do for realign the society to sustainability. And that educating them would be the best way to redirect their mindset to reality. As what Odora Hoppers (2002) claims that “a major risk to sustainability is the loss of people’s local wisdom and the basic reason for this loss is the low regards attached to it”. From this point of view, it is then reasonable to realize that the South may have something to introduce and share to the West. The alienation that human have been possessing for years may venture into the rootedness of the past. As Sillitoe (2000) asserts that “It is increasingly recognized that the initiatives for the quest to development should also consider local perceptions and the corresponding ways that are relevant to people’s needs.”

The one with the great responsibility in initiating this fusion lies in the heart of educators of the present generation. They may be products of the mainstream education they are the key executors on this matter. Schools are place where we can start recalibrating the minds of the young learners as to how education should work in connection to communal sustainable development. It will start with the curriculum. How can the recently implemented K to 12 curriculum be a tool in making this convergence possible? K to 12 curriculum can play a vital role in lessening the gaps between the role of culture in the indigenous education and the trends of the modern world in the mainstream education by using learning as a springboard in fostering the social and cultural responsibility of young learners.

Curriculum development in the mainstream may focus on the integration of culturally responsive or relevant education which stems out from educational anthropology. Gay (2000) defined the concept of this approach dealing with how culture is handover in both formal and non-formal educational set-ups. In addition, Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011) points out that teachers need to be skilled in bridging cultural knowledge to the learners for them to navigate the goals of their learning in the formal setting. A strong collaboration of home and school is encouraged especially in terms of linking their academic exposure to sociocultural experiences in the community. Through this, learners would see the relevance of their education to what is happening around them such as problems which they think they can be part of the solution once they attained their education.

As present, the focus of schooling is standardization. It lacks personalization. Curriculum must embraced contextualization. This is one of the strategies that supports culturally responsive and relevant education. This believes in the idea that prior to attending school, learners already have abundance of information derived from their personal experiences and cultural exposure. This may encompasses the practices and wisdom they’ve learned from their elders or from the norms of their community. From simple songs, dance, beliefs, values, attitudes, and other forms of communal knowledge, teachers’ role will just facilitate the harnessing of this information that learners have and the school will serve as the assurance that these information will be preserved and maintained among learners. This is the very nature of indigenizing

the mainstream education without hampering the demands of the modern times. Contextualization contends the idea that children have much to learn from our history, from our people, from our culture and from our nation.

This paper attempted to lay important underpinnings about the possible convergence of indigenous education into the mainstream. There are more work that needs to be done to explore the forms of education that are capable of fostering culturally responsive system. Although this paper can be a valuable and important contribution to the literature on fusing the mainstream and indigenous education, it only represents a minute contribution in the perspective of an educator. Rather than filling the gap in the literature – a gap far too wide to fill – it is hope that this may offer a platform for further research.

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