

Voices from the Margins: A Supplementary Praxis in Teaching Morality

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Abstract: Moral issues and concerns have a human face (and a human body). They do not exist in a vacuum and they are not just grand narratives and abstractions of human experiences of domestic and institutional violence, graft and corruption, contraception and abortion, adultery, homelessness, exploitation, environmental destruction, prostitution, human trafficking, labor contractualization, the onerous debt carried by the poorest countries and the structural adjustment program imposed by the IMF to name a few. They become concrete in the lives and the lived experiences of people and contextualized in the dynamics/interplay of society, politics, economics, culture and religion. The report of praxis that follows is a product of more than 20 years of my teaching a part of the moral enterprise (1995-2016) in the subject “The Filipino-Christian in a Changing World.” I have titled this activity Voices from the Margins (Mga Tinig mula sa Gilid) to bring home the idea that teaching morality in a poor country like the Philippines must take cognizance of the experiences of the socially marginalized, the politically powerless and disenfranchised, the economically impoverished, the culturally confused. While the poor, deprived and oppressed constitute the majority of Filipinos, their voices are muted, their concerns and aspirations neglected, their future jeopardized. As such, even the content of moral discussion should follow this grassroots bias and set aside discussions of issues like genetic engineering, stem cell research, euthanasia, organ transplant and other First World issues. This is an activity where students meet people, interact with them, ask questions, clarify issues up close and personal. “Back to the things themselves (Edmund Husserl).” The people who are invited to share their life stories come from the different sectors of society, especially the organic intellectuals: the indigenous people, commercial sex workers, men and women survivors of domestic violence, labor leaders, migrant workers especially overseas performing artists who have worked as entertainers in Japan, street families, LGBT members, political detainees, the other woman or man, contraceptive users and those who had undergone abortion, militant students/party list in congress, etc. By listening to their narratives, the students are given the chance to understand that moral issues are not neutral. Through this activity, students will gain deeper insights into how they can become a resource for Church and country by following the Vatican II methodology: see, judge and act (or more completely: human experience, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral application.)

Key Words: lived experiences; margins; organic intellectuals; socially marginalized; politically powerless; economically impoverished; grass roots bias

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Contemporary educational psychology teaches that for effective and worthwhile learning to take place, a variety of methods and activities must be done in the classroom by the teacher and students. It also teaches that the three domains of knowledge must be addressed, namely, the cognitive, the affective and the psychomotor domains and each of these requires specific tasks to be developed. In a religious or catechetical setting, this is sometimes modified as doctrine, moral and worship (creed, code, and cult). Bloom gives us a comprehensive list of tasks that is helpful in formulating objectives and choosing activities. The figure below aptly shows this.

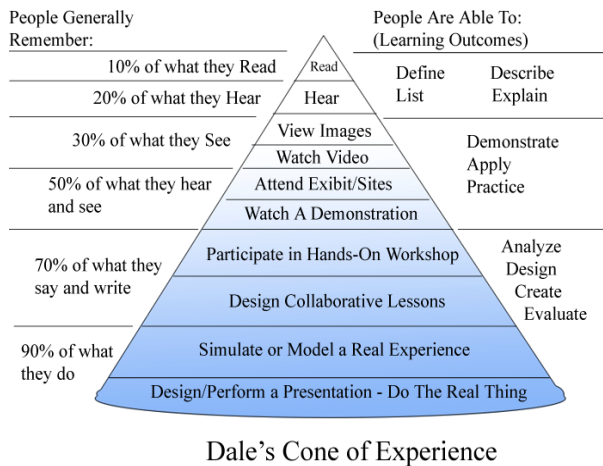
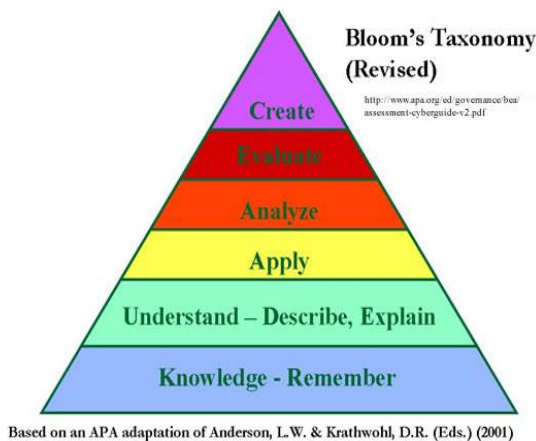


Fig.2 Bloom's Taxonomy (Revised)



Michael T. Buchanan in an article entitled “*Pedagogical Drift: The Evolution of New Approaches and Paradigms in Religious Education*” enumerates 5 approaches ; the Doctrinal approach, the Kerygmatic approach, the Life-centered approach, the Shared Christian praxis approach, the Phenomenological approach, the Typological approach and Educational approach (Buchanan: 2003).

Filipino psychologists are of the opinion that the following issues need to be included and emphasized: identity and national consciousness, social awareness and involvement, psychology of language and culture and applications and bases of Filipino psychology (health practices, agriculture, art, religion (Virgilio Enriquez: 1994 as summarized by Robert E. Javier).

Building on the work of Fr. Leonardo Mercado, SVD, Fr. Dionisio Miranda a pioneer in the country in employing vernacular concepts to make Christian ethics culturally intelligible initiated the development of a Filipino moral anthropology built on the Philippine concept of *loob* (inner self; will), re-articulating conscience as *loob-makatao* (humane inner self) or *loob moral* and highlighting virtues in Philippine categories related to the nature of one's *loob* (e.g. *kagandahang-loob* or gracious goodness as queen or form of all virtues). This is an important step— followed by younger theologians, albeit using a more discourse and praxial-based methodology— in decolonizing the faith and in instilling appreciation of our cultural categories and ways to become more fully human (Brazal, 2016).”

In tertiary Catholic schools where many students are disconnected or alienated from social, political, economic and cultural realities, activities that simulate or model a real experience is necessary to address the gap. ‘*Voices from the Margins*’ is an attempt to bridge the gap by contextualizing the life-experiences of the different sectors within a particular framework. Its objective is to deepen the students’ understanding of the challenge of the Church to work for the elimination of the roots of social injustice and dehumanizing poverty. It is also an activity wherein the concept “option for the poor” is practiced, i.e. recognizing the great wealth of

experiences, insights and wisdom that the poor can share academically.

2. MECHANICS

The class will be divided into groups. The group members will discuss with the teacher the topic they have chosen, the guest/s they intend to invite, the division of the work and the flow of the discussion. Each group leader will be empowered to see to it that the tasks are properly divided, to monitor the group and to lead in the discussion. At every stage of the planning, they are expected to consult with the teacher to clarify concerns. The students will be instructed to get their speakers from cause-oriented groups, people's organizations and other church and civic organizations. Entrance of the speakers into the university will be coordinated with the proper offices. The best way to insure that students understand what they will be doing, the teacher himself/herself should provide the first activity as a sample/model.

Outline of the activity within the classroom:

1. Opening prayer
2. Brief situationer (socio-political and economic background)
3. Life-sharing of the Guest (talk show style)
4. Open forum (question and answer)
5. Summary
6. Acknowledgments
7. Final Prayer
8. Discussion / processing (the class meeting that follows the activity)

3. REFERENCES

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