IBM eMentor Scholarship Program in Mindanao
Strategic partnerships for effective ICT use in education

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Abstract

Despite enormous economic potentials, Mindanao is one of the most underprivileged areas in the Philippines; armed conflict and government negligence hampered development of the region. Despite geographic and economic limitations, the communities are striving to reform their schools while maintaining their rich cultural heritage; hence, there is no better place to launch the IBM eMentor Scholarship Program but in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which includes the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan.

ICT paved the way towards the LIBERATION of teachers of Muslim Mindanao, as war torn and poverty stricken communities continues to experience a new classroom culture learned from their participation in the IBM eMentor Scholarship Program. This paper aims to

highlight creative ways that ICT was used for grassroots enhancement as the IBM eMentor Scholarship Program offered a framework for using ICT for the social and cultural advancement of the marginalized communities in Mindanao; it will also present strategic partnerships as an innovative approach furthering ICT in education.

The IBM eMentor Scholarship Program is the collaborative effort of IBM Philippines EduQuest, Inc., USAID-funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM-2) Project, MSU, ARMM local government, and DepEd ARMM. This strategic partnership became the driving force in creating the new classroom management practices in 22 high schools in the ARMM. With the institutional guidance and intervention of these institutions, and by pooling together the management expertise and resources of these institutions, a considerable impact- through the various ICT-enabled practices and initiatives- down to the level of the classroom became evident. It is only though such partnerships where we see a significant impact in the socio-cultural changes in the ARMM region as well as the Mindanao region as a whole and more specifically the indigenous communities where these schools belong.

The IBM eMentor Scholarship Program provided a baseline model for smooth transition of schools toward meaningful ICT enablement and modernization and thus set the pace for education policy makers, managers and administrators to renew educational goals in the regions. It is hoped that this program will be the start of similar efforts and will serve as a model for future collaborative work among the different sectors in the Philippine society in laying the foundation for peace in the community grounded on a new perspective in education.

BACKGROUND

Mindanao is one of the most underprivileged areas in the Philippines. Despite the enormous economic potentials of the island of Mindanao, a greater majority of the population still lives in poverty. Armed conflict and government negligence had hampered the development of the region. Most of the schools are located in remote areas that are further isolated by their limited access to information technologies and most of these most school communities were ranked by the National Statistics Office severely economically impoverished. Despite these geographic and economic limitations, the communities are striving to reform their schools while maintaining their rich cultural heritage. **(see Annex A for an IBM eMentor's vivid description of the situation in Mindanao)** Hence, there is no better place to launch the IBM eMentor program but in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which includes the provinces of Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan.

THE IBM EMENTOR PROGRAM

IBM eMentor is a Corporate Community Relations Program on Teacher Professional Development in educational technology spear-headed by IBM Philippines in cooperation with EduQuest, Inc., IBM's education consulting partner and the U.S. Agency for International Development in the Philippines (USAID/Philippines) through the Computer Literacy Internet Connection (CLIC) Program of Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM).

To advocate, challenge, and accelerate **teacher professional development** in effective and appropriate use of educational technology tools as a means to **enhance and improve educational results in Philippine Secondary Schools** demanded of contemporary times, the IBM eMentor program intended to:

- Develop self-awareness among teachers and institutional profiling of teacher skills and competencies
- Enhance teacher knowledge and practice of technology integration among a select group of teachers
- Propagate and disseminate models of practice: as exemplified in the teacher portfolio and certificate of competency

IBM EMENTOR'S IMPACT AND OUTCOME

The IBM eMentor Program had a considerable impact on the program beneficiaries as it fostered new learning opportunities for both the students and teachers.

TEACHER COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

The training and learning sessions enabled the eMentors to improve their instructional competencies as well as proficiency in the use of educational technology. As a result, the teachers felt more prepared to integrate technology into

their classroom instruction and utilize instructional technology; they were also able to apply what they learned by integrating technology into their traditional teaching methods and using new teaching approaches. It was also observed that teachers became more comfortable with educational technology; as one of the teacher-beneficiaries commented that the program enabled them to "become mobilizers of technology". It enhanced the educators' skills and abilities in making the learner learn more.

CLASSROOM IMPACT

The teachers conveyed that the program helped them and it catered to the needs of their students. Because of the program, the teachers were equipped to facilitate the teaching and learning process more effectively. The teachers are firmly convinced that this interactive mode of learning has resulted in higher interest, retention, and performance compared to traditional classroom teaching. Interestingly, the impact has been more significant on the slow learners, who have displayed better understanding of concepts and are more confident and interactive in the class before.

According to Norain Ampang, biology teacher, the topics where educational technology is most applicable:

- The lessons that require imagination on the part of the teacher
- Topics that have linear linkage and are fundamental to the understanding of the subject matter

In general, teachers felt that while a few lessons can be taught entirely through the use of technology, others are best taught using the traditional approaches but enhanced by technology.

WHAT THE IBM eMENTORS ARE SAYING

The IBM eMentors felt that the program had a substantial impact in their respective schools; the following are excerpts of teacher comments:

- "Oh, if only I could paint and recapture the faces of my students while viewing my lesson on the computer, I would have done it! It would have shown their amazing reaction. It would have shown how they gazed at the monitor, with great puzzlement and wide-eyed wonder on their faces. Some are gaping, some have their eyes go back and forth between me and the computer, and some have funny smiles on their faces. For the first time, timid students were actively answering my questions. For the first time, hyperactive students were momentarily captivated by the lesson. It's one of the moments in my life as a teacher that I don't wanna ever forget.

To give you a picture of what I did just to show them my lesson. I opened one of the computers in the computer laboratory and had my lesson, with them sitting on the floor. I know I'm supposed to give them the lesson on a conducive setting, but it's the only way to show them! Even with cramped conditions, my students went out of the room with expressions on their faces as if they just had watched a good movie. I could hear their excited chatter even as they were all long gone to their classroom.

This kind of reaction gives me inspiration to make more lessons and find new materials to show them. I know its no easy feat but no matter what great lengths I have to make, I would do it inshaallah(God willing)." - - **Ms. Nor-ain Ampang, Mindanao State University - Baloi Biology teacher**

▪ **Mr. Aquil S. Andog, an English and Social Studies teacher from Malabang National High School**, was initially apprehensive in joining the program as it entailed additional workload. Now he is more than happy to be part of the programas he shared one of his experiences with the program:

" I would like to share with you the very first time i had my demonstration using technology through multi-media presentaion in our school. it was the visitation of the Basic Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM) Davao here in our school and my Department Head in English gave me the chance to have my Demonstarion. nevertheless, i accept the offer and did earnestly. i had my demo-teaching in our computer laboratory with my first year English class. **it was well appreciated by the BEAM people and by the school administration. i was congratulated by the BEAM officials. they saw how advanced our school is being the divisional leader school in the division of Lanao Sur II. They were amazed also that our school is a recipient of IBM EMENTOR PROGRAM**................... i am so glad i had the opportunity to give name again to our school. **i really noticed there is a magic of technology. with this, i think we are gonna role the world IBM EMENTORS**."

▪ **Math teacher Mr. Arnold Asptigue from Lanao del Sur** says that the program made "**a big diffference happened in the sense that students are now eager to conduct our classes in the lab room rather than in the class.** But of the light chaotic condition of the place we had a limited time to pursue the lesson presentation when we will suddenly hear what they call "music

in the air"(Translated: Gunfire). We will immediately be going home for our safety."

- ***Maryam Manalundong***, Math Teacher, declared that what she learned from the IBM eMentor is applicable in her subject and she went on describing the first time she practiced what she learned: "my students were amazed and even go on wondering how did I do that. Others even went on the wall to touch the surface of the wall why does the pictures went on the wall. When our principal saw the whole situation, she was amazed also and appreciated the integration or using of technology as an intstructional tool."

These examples are indicative of the largley positive response to the IBM eMentor program among the teacher-beneficiaries. The IBM eMentors are united in declaring the impact it had on their respective schools, especially on their students and themselves.

Through this strategic intervention, IBM eMentor is solving education's problems with innovative solutions that draw on education technology to pave the way for systemic reforms in the education sector.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AS CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES

Strategic partnerships are essential to exploit social opportunities effectively in today's changing educational environment, and at the same time, they are an important tool that can be used to make educational reforms growth that is inclusive and sustainable. This paper aims to highlight what the IBM eMentor Program has been doing to promote these partnerships in the ARMM, focusing more on our innovative work in this area, as well as showing the potential of such partnerships as an instrument to foster educational technology initiatives.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS DEFINED

The definition of strategic partnership that this paper would adopt is, therefore, a broad one, that blends both the productive and social cohesion aspects of the development brought by the IBM eMentor Program. It encompasses the role of private sector companies like IBM, the government – though the DepEd, MSU and LGU in establishing the "enabling" environment, funding agencies like the USAID through the GEM Program, an academic consulting company that promotes the appropriate use of educational technology - EduQuest, Inc. and the teacher-beneficiaries as active partners in development.

Proponents' Synergy. The IBM eMentor Scholarship Program is the collaborative effort of IBM Philippines EduQuest, Inc., USAID-funded Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM-2) Project, MSU, ARMM local government, and DepEd ARMM. This strategic partnership became the driving force in creating the new classroom management practices in 22 high schools in the ARMM. With the institutional guidance and intervention of these institutions, and by pooling together the management expertise and resources of these institutions, a considerable impact-through the various ICT-enabled practices and initiatives- down to the level of the classroom became evident. It is only though such partnerships where we see a significant impact in the socio-cultural changes in the ARMM region as well as the Mindanao region as a whole and more specifically the indigenous communities where these schools belong.

Stakeholders' Synergy. The program proponents recognize that they should not just run the program but provide a stimulating environment for the teacher-implementers. Hence, the following initiatives were implemented:

Teacher Professional Development. The teacher-implementers participated in ten-day teacher training program that enabled them to develop their skills in curriculum technology integration. The IBM e Mentors were trained on the rudiments and the various aspects of technology integration and followed by an implementation period where the teacher-implementers are guided during actual practice throughout the school year. Within the school year, learning sessions were also conducted to further enhance the teachers' competencies.

Monitoring and Reinforcement of Teacher Practice. Being proficient in technology integration requires practice and affirmation from experts in the field; in this line, EduQuest conducted the following during consultation visits:

- *Expert Advising Sessions*
  - o eMentors consulted the Instruction Specialists on lesson development, classroom management and issues that they have encountered during the practice of educational technology

- *Classroom Observation Sessions*
  - o The eMentors are observed during a teaching demonstration on a lesson plan enabled by technology.
  - o Administrators, division supervisors, other teachers and other stakeholders were invited to observe during the demonstration to provide a model on how a technology-based lesson plan is delivered
- *Learning Session*
  - o Short training sessions were conducted either to refresh the eMentors on the basics of curriculum technology integration or to reinforce their knowledge and skills on new innovations.

Recognition of Best Practices in Integrating Educational Technology. The eMentors are expected to face difficulties in the process of transforming and innovating classroom instruction in their respective schools. Proficiency in curriculum technology integration takes time. Regular practice is the key to enable the teachers

to have a good grasp of the issues surrounding the practice of educational technology. The fact that the situation in their schools may not necessarily be supportive to innovations like technology integration in the classroom makes it more imperative that the eMentors are duly recognized and rewarded. A Recognition of Practice event is slated this coming October 2006.

Intertwining of Technology and Culture. When teaching and learning strategies have been imposed from outside the Mindanao communities, they have generally been unsuccessful in enriching the culture. As technology integration to indigenous community schools was the main goal of the project, the proponents regarded indigenous culture as the primary consideration of the program; how to integrate technology in the schools as well as allow the flourishing of the indigenous culture became the an underlying goal.

Through the IBM eMentor Program the teachers were able to design and develop instructional materials that are relevant to the indigenous communities in the Mindanao region. They connected real life experiences of the students to their subject areas and used technology to provide greater appreciation and deeper understanding by the students.

Collaboration and cooperation between funders and the beneficiaries in educational reforms is an area where the optimal use of the stakeholders' resources can create added value for the education system as a whole.

Teachers' Synergy. With the aim of propagating the practice of educational technology in the region, providing a venue for collaboration should be at the heart of the IBM eMentor program. The eMentors are geographically apart were able to share their despite the distance.

Online Discussion Groups and Weblogs. Even during the training, the use of the weblogs and e-groups provided a sense of community and openness among the facilitators and the eMentors.

The IBM eMentor Buzz, http://www.ibmementor.blogspot.com served as the main venue for the participants to share their thoughts, their experiences, their reflections, their musings and just about anything related to the program. The entries are raw and unadulterated. Stakeholders of the project can somehow immediately know how the implementation has been going so far.

EduQuest also maintained the IBM eMentor 2006 Discussion Group in Yahoo, http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/IBMeMentor2006; this became a site for online consultations, surveys, file database, calendars, photos and the likes.

Prompt replies from the facilitators and administrators of both the blog and the egroup are necessary to inspire them.

IBM Mentorplace. The IBM Mentorplace, http://www.mentorplace.org , provided a very good venue for one on one mentoring. Specific classroom activities were developed and assigned to the eMentors for them to try out in their own respective classes

IBM EMENTOR - AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The IBM eMentor Program The IBM eMentor Program is evolving into an ongoing collaborative community of practice by forging collaborations among themselves other educational institutions, government agencies, and funding organizations each of which brings unique strengths and fresh opportunities to the program. It presents an innovative model of strategic partnerships as an important instrument for educational reforms, and have a lasting impact on the education sector in the ARMM.

ANNEX A

It was February 2000, when war between the Phil. Army and the MILF broke out in the municipality where I teach. Classes were suspended as people literally flee from their homes. Yet teachers reported to school everyday to meet deadlines for the upcoming graduation amidst shells and bombs breaking out nearby.

One has to deal with war as one in the north deals with traffic. Coming to teach in a rural area has been very hard for me. Having been brought up and educated in an urban area made it very difficult for me to adapt to the rural way of life, particularly to the traditional Maranao way of life. But because of my love for teaching, I get to love the community, my colleagues, and my students. To inform those who doesn't know about Baloi, Lanao del Norte (the place where I teach) it is the place where the National Power Corporation Hydroelectric Powerplant is located. This place supplies almost all of Mindanao's electricity. Thus Baloi is one of the richest municipalities in the region in terms of national wealth.

It is also a place where Christians and Muslims live side by side in peace for decades. There is a Franciscan seminary and countless churches that scatters all over the place side by side with mosques.

Baloi's war past is now over, written only in history books and stamped in the minds of the people. Thus, my task as a teacher is twice as hard. I have to teach my students not only the academic requirements that im bound to teach, but to let them forget the wars in their minds, to remove in their minds perceptions that they have believed in. I have to always remember that these children are not ordinary children, but these are children of war.

I know that im not only speaking for myself. Always the ones who helps return the community in semblance of order, the ones who returns first

on the schoolground, and the ones who return the children to normalcy.

It is a wonder that somewhere in the north, some people has the vision to recognize the forgotten heroes of the south. That somewhere, some people would make it a mission to improve the plight of the forgotten teachers of the south. By spreading this kind of work, its not only the teachers who would be forever grateful for the people who makes this possible, but the whole community in general.

Now our children can experience what the children in urban areas have been enjoying for years. Children of the war can now be children enriched with bright future ahead of them. Enriched with new innovations that technology can muster.

And for that we would be forever grateful for organizations like GEM(USAID) and IBM for making all these possible.

By improving teachers with new innovations and new technologies in teaching, you're improving the lives of the children, making it possible for them to leap beyond their world.