

PAARALANG PANTAO (SCHOOL FOR HUMANITY)

Brief Profile

How it began

Paaralang Pantao's humble beginnings can be traced back from the residence of its founder -- Mrs. Leticia Reyes, a then widow of five children, and three grand children. What began as a simple home tutorial to her three grand children has later included the children of her neighbors whose parents are mostly illiterate and have no resources to send their children even to government schools.

The school was formally established in 1989 as a project initiated by the partnership of a women's organization – the Dumpsite Neighborhood Organization (DNO) in the barangay, which was also organized by Mrs. Reyes; and the then *Salinsining* (now known as Children's Laboratory for Drama in Education Foundation or Children's Lab.) – in response to the growing call by the community to provide an education to their children.

It wasn't called a school at that time but rather a simple area visit held every week by the workers of Salinsining who are mostly practicing artists and educators. These visits were spent in launching various creative activities which included role-plays, songs, games, puppet shows, health skits, and many more.

Paaralang Pantao was first known as Zamboanga Day Care Center (named after the street where it was then located). Not long after, with more children and youths coming in and with varying needs, the project implementers (DNO and Salinsining) then named the center "Paaralang Pantao (People's School)".

The school continued to evolve and even became a popular subject for college and even graduate students here and from abroad for their thesis. Testimonials would even say that Paaralang Pantao teaches more about Humanity, and in response, it's founder Mrs. Leticia Reyes then changed its English name again from People's School to "School for Humanity".

The school adopted a number of learning experiences and practical lessons from the alternative curriculum used by the Children's Laboratory in its Street Children Program. The curriculum used was called alternative because it had unique characteristics as compared to the one used in formal schools. This was also primarily based on the children's day- to-day experiences, the realities they have to face, as well as their varied needs. All these were 'experience-based, life-based, and need-based.'

The Students

Starting with the program, which targeted children, aged 7 years and below, the alternative school eventually accepted older children as its beneficiaries. In accepting these children, the criteria were simple: These kids are:

- Those who stopped schooling or who continually drop out from school
- Those who cannot afford to go to school

- Those who are not in school (mostly working in the dumpsite)

They had different needs. And since they were mostly working as scavengers, many of them did not go to school and even stopped schooling. Some of them however, were new residents of Barangay Payatas and from their own provinces, were not able to continue school after stopping for quite some time. With this in mind, a special program was initiated for their benefit:

- Tutorial classes were given to elementary graders who were attending schools far from the dumpsite.
- Assistance was also given to some children who wanted to take the Philippine Educational Placement Test to help them go back to formal school.
- There were some who "just desire" to acquire the three basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic

The Care-Teachers

The first teachers of the People's School were staff members of the Children's Laboratory, including 4-5 volunteers from the children's mothers. The purpose is to demonstrate to the non-professional teachers, ways and means to run a school programme. Eventually, the residents of Barangay Payatas served as facilitators of learning.

Paaralang Pantao Today

There were numerous, compounding; yet varying experiences of learning in the Paaralang Pantao. In fact, from the beginning up to this time, these experiences continue to change its face. And these could be as fast as the changing, shifting, and the coming and going of the families living in the dumpsite. It is also as high as the pile of garbage gathered and deposited since the 1980's up to today.

To date, Paaralang Pantao has two centers – Payatas Dumpsite in Quezon City where it has 80 students and 2 care-teachers; and Sub-Urban Village (more known as Erap City) in Rodriguez, Rizal where it caters to more than 200 students with 5 care-teachers.

Paaralang Pantao also runs a feeding program aiming to improve not just the physical but also the mental nourishment of its students.

The school also provides an opportunity and venue for various groups and individuals to share their time and resources to less fortunate children and their families through various outreach programs such as medical missions, educational field trips, immersion programs, Christmas parties, and more.