



# Case Study 7

## HR/OD Intervention Focus: Leadership and Management in Education

### Fighting for DepEd Recognition

As program head of Iloilo National High School's School of the Future (SOF), Toni Fernandez confides that her role is similar to that of a school principal. After three years of overseeing this Department of Education (DepEd) initiative, she felt that she needed to beef up her leadership

skills to help her manage the school more effectively. This prompted her to apply for the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS). After qualifying for a slot, Fernandez was recommended to the Department of Education (DepEd) for nomination. She went to Australia in August 2012 to study Master in Education Leadership and Management at the University of Newcastle.

### Beyond REAP

Now, as she tells it, it seems that her main struggle upon her return lies with DepEd. Though Fernandez defines her REAP as a curriculum review, her main advocacy and challenge is to get DepEd to approve SOF as a special program rather than a mere teaching strategy. Although it began as such in 1996, SOF has since evolved because of its widespread community acceptance. Fernandez emphasises, “My objective actually in going to Australia is to prove to DepEd that I can lead the school because that is what I studied in Australia— that I can lead a program and turn it into something which will contribute to the education of our youth.”

This move to get SOF recognised as a special program actually caps the thrust of her REAP and personal advocacy, which she has pursued even before her scholarship. Up until Fernandez’s designation as Program Head of SOF in 2011, no review of the computer education curriculum had been done to keep the Iloilo National High School abreast of current developments in information technology. As soon as she came in, she conducted a review and discovered that indeed, the school curriculum was already outdated. “I asked experts to review our curriculum and took on their suggestions to have both software and hardware integrated into the curriculum, aside from the basic DepEd curriculum. I then asked the principal to hire personnel who can take care of these enhancement subjects,” she explains.

Fernandez then sought the support of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) in sustaining the program and as a result, they were able to buy tools and new computers for the students. “Within three months, I submitted a revised curriculum to the DepEd Regional Office. Luckily, the Regional Director approved the revision. Shortly after, I left for Australia to study,” she says.

Since coming back, Fernandez has continued to supplement her REAP. She has managed to beef up their computer education subjects as well as get an information technology expert onboard to handle the hardware aspect of computer education. She has once again sought the assistance of the PTA which allowed SOF to buy equipment necessary for their computer hardware servicing section.

### **Implementing and fulfilling a vision**

Fernandez admits that her REAP is peculiar as it was initiated even before she left for Australia and was implemented by the other schoolteachers in her absence. Although it reverses the usual paradigm of REAP resulting from scholarship and/or intervention, she feels there was a compelling reason as to why it was allowed. “I think it was probably considered valid because of the K-12 curriculum coming in. It was an innovation that needed to be sustained and we sustained it on our own with no help from the Central Office. PAHRODF probably recognized it as a special program. We also proved that it had become prestigious, as we had graduates who excelled in their chosen fields or careers that are outside of computer education,” she proudly declares.

The SOF was supposed to be in place only for two years but the principal decided to continue it even after DepEd ceased its financial support for the program. As Fernandez narrates, “The

push towards converting the School of the Future from a computer-aided instruction [program] with just one section of star pupils to a separate program came in 2008 when a new SOF Head was appointed. SOF began tapping outside sources like the PTA and other local business establishments for support.”

Through continued external assistance, SOF aims to have a separate system, its own set of facilities and equipment, specialised classes, and personnel to handle it – like a small school within the Iloilo National High School. While SOF is operational, Ms. Fernandez’s frustration, as she puts it, is with DepEd’s inability to share SOF’s goals and assist them. According to her, DepEd up to now still insists that SOF is limited to a mere teaching strategy. “They should have monitored its growth, its development. Now that we have developed it into a program, they should have recognised our efforts to sustain it even without their help. So hopefully when I see them, when I talk to them, I would be able to convince them that we have sustained the program and we should be given due recognition,” she laments.

Fernandez shares, “SOF’s progress has caught DepEd by surprise. They did not see it evolving into a special program because they could not see how we could sustain it. They were surprised to learn that we already have 42 units of computers, special facilities, our own audio-visual room, our own library. We are not using the school library anymore. We have our own science library.”

### **Full-blown advocacy**

Even with these measures in place, additional support is still necessary. In trying to raise funds for their students, Fernandez was even motivated to solicit funding from possible benefactors

in Australia, although without much success. While she could have already been content with what SOF has already achieved, she recognises its potential in helping more of Iloilo's youth. Clearly, Fernandez has taken her REAP beyond just a curriculum review, bringing it into the arena of a full-blown advocacy to benefit her students more.

Pressing on, she is emboldened by what she has learned from her studies, especially as they have just recently had another batch of graduates. "My degree from the University of Newcastle is on Leadership and Management in Education. It has taught me that I can do anything I want as long as I set my heart to it. In Australia, the culture is that we are equals. So for my part, that is the best education. I should not fear anybody because they are just my equals," she explains. And this exactly what Fernandez will keep in mind when she meets and makes her case with DepEd officials within the month. "Having that degree from a prestigious university and backed up by the scholarship from the Government of Australia, I will be able to convince DepEd Central Office that SOF is worthy to be a program, worthy to have its own rules and regulations as a national high school and that we should have our own set of graduates, our own set of honour students. Our parents association should be recognised because they are also stakeholders in this. We have proof that we have sustained the program and DepEd should at least recognise our effort," Ms. Fernandez proclaims.

Fernandez has big plans for SOF. Her aim is to get SOF included in the K-12 program. The principal has already agreed and has committed to adopt SOF as part of the technical and vocational track for senior high under the K-12 curriculum. In addition to information technology, the school will also be including nursing care to arm the students with practical skills they can use to secure employment even if they only manage to complete high school. As Fernandez puts it, "Even if students do not proceed to complete a bachelor's degree, they would be able to acquire the skills from this school. I am not well versed in computers, but as long as the SOF lives on, the technology and vocational strand of the senior high school will be there, even if I am not. And that is okay with me."

*Toni Fernandez finished her Master of Leadership and Management in Education from University of Newcastle in 2013. The title of her REAP is The Future of the School of the Future*