

# TRAINING TIME



The story of



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## Training Time

Have you ever been in a situation that you know, absolutely, you were made for? That every part of your life, even from birth, was intended to prepare you for exactly this time? All the career choices and changes, the big brothers and little sisters, poor bosses and excellent mentors, bad choices and “learning opportunities” had led you to this moment and prepared you to serve in a specific way. And now that you are here, the insecurity that normally haunts every decision, melts away to confidence and assurance that God will give you the strength and tools necessary to complete the task. You finally get the big “Aha!” moment that you have always sought from the students you teach or the teachers you lead. Just like Esther, you know that everything you have gone through was a training time for a specific work that you were meant to accomplish at such a time as this. There is no greater feeling than this: that God has prepared a specific work for you to do, sent you through training in preparation for the work, and you are doing that work. I am familiar with good, warm hearted feelings. Not the kind that results from wealth and fame, because I’ve never had either of those. But, I have presented at national conferences with a solution to a problem that large companies were facing. I’ve driven down a residential street and had many children stop their play to yell out

“Hey, Mr. Coltrane!” I hugged parents after hours in intense meetings about their student. I have a glorious wife and four beautiful children with individual personalities with whom God has blessed me. Each of these make me feel like a rock star, but none can compare to knowing that God has work He wants to accomplish, and that He has trained me to complete it.



In this book, I want to investigate this concept of “Training Time” in multiple ways: what my training time looked like; how we designed a brand-new school to be a training center; and a specific strategy we used to assist students who had difficulties meeting our expectations. This concept of training time, combined with educational philosophy, project management and cultural considerations, tells a story that I pray will be beneficial for those of you in education, or seeking the Lord’s will for your life. This is not my story, but the story of what God did in one community that I was honored to be a part of.

*Ben Coltrane*

## The Project

The Philippines boast over 7,000 islands in their nation. The 7<sup>th</sup> largest is called Mindoro, and is just



an hour bangka ride, (boat with outriggers), across the Verde Channel, plus another hour drive on the tollway from the southern edge of the nation's capital of Manila. (This short trip can also take 6-9 hours depending on the weather and traffic!) All year long, many national and international tourists take the somewhat short trip to Puerto Galera, the northernmost municipality on Mindoro, to enjoy the beautiful beaches, world-class diving, and slower pace. The one road on the perimeter of the island is now complete, (almost), and is a beautiful drive. You only have to watch out for the goats, dogs, carabao, and people that share the road, and not worry about engaging the 4-wheel drive or dodging large (enough to fit a VW in) potholes and unfinished sections of road that recently existed. That is, until you get to the end of the road. This is the barangay, (small village) of Aninuan. Here, the



coconut and palm tree covered slopes of Mt. Malasimbo seem to be a perfect diving platform into the calm bay and

quiet beaches that host a variety of resorts. These resorts capitalize on the paradise around them and invite tourists from all over the world. But



just behind them, on the other side of the national road, live the local people. They live in the same paradise, but their front porch looks different. The ones who can afford to, live in concrete hollow block homes covered with sheet metal. Those who can't, make their homes out of whatever materials are available: ¼" plywood or cardboard, split bamboo or palm leaves, tarpaulins from the last election or driftwood left from the most recent typhoon. The homes sometimes have electricity, running water or sanitation. Some don't have any of these. Many still cook rice over a fire with wood they woke up early to gather. Refrigeration and cooktops are few, and dictate how meals they have planned are prepared. There are not many jobs available locally, other than the few at the beach resorts. Many turn to serving the tourists in any way they can to make money to put the rice on the table.



Some do massage, guide tours or sell bracelets on the beach. When that

doesn't work, there is a diving area not far away, where foreigners and tourists will pay for companionship while on their vacation.

In Aninuan, there is no high school, so the local children are faced with a decision after grade six. Those with parents who can afford it, make the trip every day to the municipal high school.

This transportation is expensive, not considering that the students are not able to assist their family while they are in school. Many stop going to school, because they are faced with too many challenges and too little support.

But in 2007, hope came to the valley of Aninuan. An American began buying bracelets in bulk from the beach vendors, and selling them in the US. This allowed those

vendors to stay home and watch their children, rather than haunting the beaches, searching for a buyer. And the profits were brought back to buy more bracelets, until hundreds of families were selling bracelets. This kept rice on the table without the parents leaving the children to fend for themselves, or under the care of an older sister who





was kept out of school to watch over the younger siblings. Soon, a pastor came to start a church. With the proceeds of the bracelets, they bought some land, built a church building and began dreaming of a better future for their children. When the next opportunity came to build, they requested a school. And it was built! A beautiful 2-story building at the back of the church with 10 rooms that could be used to educate their children. The walls were painted white, and red tile was laid on the floors in preparation for the day that the school would open. With the large meeting area for the church in front of the school, covered by a basketball gymnasium, surrounded by 3 hectares of titled land in their name, they were ready! Now, who would start the school? The years of prayers were starting to be answered by a physical building; and their continued prayers for it to start operating, demonstrated the strength of their faith.





## The Qualifications

I was a failure as an administrator. After three years as an elementary principal, I was asked to resign before I was fired. The next gig was much shorter, and from the gathering of intense teachers at the board meeting where I announced I had accepted a new position the following year, it was going to



be the same request. I was told I did not communicate well by one supervisor, and the other said I was only there in the first place because there was no one else available. Not the ideal candidate to start a school from bare concrete walls and red tile floor! I said as much to Alex, the missionary who started the bracelet ministry. I warned him what had happened. But he still wanted me to come. And I did. I came as a failure, still gun-shy from the previous two attempts at leadership. And this is exactly how God wanted me to come. He wanted me to come with no plans, no pre-conceived notions about what was best, no triumphal entry as the savior to a people in poverty. As a failure, He was able to show His greatness through my weakness. It was abundantly clear that it was not by any of my super powers that the school was started successfully. He had a plan and He simply needed a body with hands and feet and voice to carry out His plan. Over the next four years, He showed me that plan, and how He had trained me to carry it out. My childhood in a large

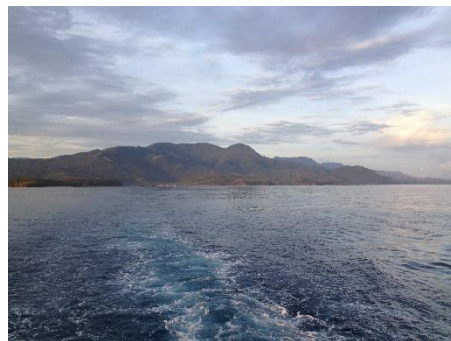
family that was poor in money and possessions, but rich in the provision and mercy of God, prepared me to connect with those students who grew up in a similar way. I had learned to work hard and had many different experiences as I worked growing up to pay for education and wants beyond my basic needs. I collected aluminum cans for recycling money, delivered newspapers in all kinds of weather. I mowed lawns all over the small town I grew up in, as well as hauled hay, worked construction, landscaping, sacking feed at a mill and worked summers at a moving company. The money from these jobs paid for the Levi's I wanted, the truck to work more jobs, as well as Dairy Queen and Sonic when I wanted more than the good cooking Mom had at home. It also paid for my college, in combination with academic scholarships. This upbringing prepared me to be the leader/custodian/maintenance man at the school I was to start. I now understood why I switched from a degree in engineering to one in education; why I had spent all my savings on a one-year Bible Certificate before deciding to become a teacher; the seven years I taught math in middle school, and took classes in school leadership so that my wife could stay home with our little baby; why I had lost those jobs as principal, and accepted a job at a technical college teaching in a program in which I had no experience. He had a plan for me. He wanted me to have prior



experience to draw upon, but in a humble position to do things His way.

## The Call

My wife, Sara, and I were in a good place the summer of 2013. I had a good job teaching at the local technical college. She had a small music studio that energized her a few days a week and let her escape from being a full-time mom to our three wonderful kids. Our children were old enough to stay with grandparents for an extended time. We had finished paying off lingering debts. And we had just moved into a massive Victorian house that we had found vacant except for the pigeons on the third floor...and the bats on the second floor...plus the opossums and squirrels and cats that went wherever they wanted. I fixed it up first, of course, minus the kitchen and third floor and back addition; but that is another story much too long for here. We were enjoying life in small town Kansas, serving at church and living the dream. I had never traveled internationally before, or much past Missouri, to be more precise. So, of course, our first mission trip was halfway around the world for ten days. We had a good reason for this. It was to encourage missionaries from our church who had been there for the past 17 years. We'd also do a mini VBS, feeding programs, street ministry and a few touristy things. So there I was, sweating through a robe with a crown of locust thorns on my head telling the story of Christ on the streets of Manila to children who couldn't understand a word I



said, but smiled just the same. It was the last two days of the trip that we visited Mindoro, and did a two-day mini



VBS at the church when I saw the school for the first time. We did the program after school each day, and in the morning I got to help paint and cut angle iron for the basketball goal with the thinnest hack saw I have ever seen. It was there that I first met Pastor Al, and asked him what was being built. "It's a school", he said. "You see, we teach the children who come, and then they go home. Their parents come back and want to know what we are teaching since the children are acting more respectful and responsible at home. So, we want to build a school and teach the children." I was amazed at their faith in God to build the building and pray for someone to start it.

On the bangka ride back to Manila, I asked the missionary we had come to visit: "Do you think they want some help opening the school?" He said they probably did, and would get me the email of the founder. After a few conversations with Alex and Chris Kuhlrow, it became evident that I wouldn't be much help as a part-time consultant or short-term visitor. They needed someone on site for 2-3 years to really help the school to get started. After lots of prayer and discussions with family, our pastor and other mentors, we decided that indeed, God was calling us to serve at the school. We would need

to become missionaries so that we would have the support needed to be successful. One Challenge accepted us as missionaries, and in July of 2015 I quit my job at the college, we rented out our newly renovated dream house, put our car up for sale and made final preparations to leave for the Philippines.



## The Family

God never calls you to serve in a location or task that will require you to sacrifice your family. This was a



fundamental belief Sara and I felt strongly about. If God was calling me to start the school, then we were committed to seeking ways for Sara and the children to serve also. Our first week on the island was spent in one of the empty classrooms of the school while waiting for a room at the hotel to open up after Christmas. And the prior month was spent living in various homes and guesthouses in Manila while meeting the other missionaries on our One Challenge team. So there we were, Sara and I, with our four children (Surprise! Samantha had come a year before while in the middle of applying to become missionaries) in a two-bedroom hotel suite right on the beach. I stacked all four of the twin beds provided into two sets of bunk beds, (double-deck if you are speaking Filipino-English) for the kids in one room. Their room over-looked the bay, and they could fall to sleep with the gentle sound of the waves barely 100 meters from their windows. But we got the air-con bedroom! The downstairs was our kitchen/dining/living/home-school/office/hosting room. We were fortunate to have these rooms for several months while looking for a suitable house to rent in the village.



I had grown up in the same house my entire life. The same was true of Sara, but in the farmhouse that had been in her family for generations. Over the next four years, we would live in seven different locations, not counting all the places we lived for a week or two at a time. Through all these transitions, Sara was the glue. Where she was, was home. She had brought a few items from our house, and set them up in each of the locations we lived so that it felt homey. But really, she was the one that kept it all together. She figured out how to buy ingredients and make some of our comfort foods that we missed so much. She established Friday night pizza and movie night that was rarely interrupted. She fed us, kept the house clean and organized, home-schooled the children each day, taught music at the school, invited in new friends for Bible study and reached out to students struggling at school. She encouraged Clara to develop her love for animals, and care for the abandoned or donated pets. (I bought the rabbit, but was cautious when the chickens and monkey and dog and others animals showed up.) She didn't fuss too much when Noah slid down the coconut tree after climbing to the top (Again, I was responsible for encouraging him.) She understood when Elliott shut down and needed time alone. And even managed to do it all with baby Samantha tagging along at every step. I did my one job every day, but



she did the dozen  
other jobs that  
allowed our family  
to be together.



## The Research

The start of the school was an empty building and the years of prayers of the church members. When I arrived, I had a file about how to start an international school saved on my laptop and a list of questions on a piece of notebook paper. How do you start a school? How could we finance it, when the students could not even afford to attend the free public school? What curriculum would we use? Where would the teachers come from? We had a rare opportunity here: we could create any kind of school we wanted! But how could we succeed when so many others had failed. How could our students be successful and get jobs when the graduates from schools with money had difficulty getting jobs? But since my attempts at leadership through problem-solving had failed before, I started with listening. I talked to parents, community members, government officials, school employees...anyone who would sit down with me and tell me their story so that I could better understand the situation I faced.

Moms told me about husbands who were not able to find work, and left the family for months at a time to work in Manila; about a husband who wanted a boy, and left his family after the 7<sup>th</sup> girl was born; about an oldest child who quit school so



that the little money they had could send the younger siblings to school. A father told me about a wife who was working abroad in Saudi Arabia for the past two years, the only work she could find. A pastor told me how he traveled hours to school as a child, and lived there during the week, it was so far from home.

A government worker described how the greatest difficulty to people was job mis-match; how a college graduate would take a job pumping gas because it was the first job he could get to help support his family; how many of the jobs available, and entrance into college, required an English proficiency test as part of the application process. A former superintendent of education told me

how education in the Philippines was much the same as it was in the US, and how \$200 per month would be an excellent wage for a private school teacher.



I filled pages of my planner with the answers to my questions. The questions were always the same. I asked them to tell me their story; what the challenges were that they faced; what kind of school they wanted for their children; and what goals they had for their children. The answers weren't always the same, but soon a consensus was becoming clear: Life had challenges, but God was

good. Goals for the children were the same: To find a job easily after graduation; to learn about God; and to not marry early.



This last one was deep. I did not hear names and dates of young girls who were married to foreigners so that the family could

be provided for, but it was clear that it happened. Parents had hopes that their children could choose their career path, but generations of extreme poverty and limited options to provide were difficult to overcome.

I never completely read the file about how to start an international school. From my discussions, it was clear that we would not be starting an international school. The students might find work abroad as their best option for a career, but we did not want to encourage it based upon the number of broken families that kind of life left in its wake. We also did not want to promote any dependence upon foreigners. Toxic charity had washed through the valley and left too many waiting to be cared for by others rather than accomplishing what they could on their own. Cultural generosity and hospitality was crushed when visitors were only seen as sources of income. Students needed a local school staffed by local teachers with a local curriculum that could one day be supervised by local leadership. They needed someone to believe in them, so

that they could raise their heads up and believe in their own abilities and work toward their own goals. They could do it, but it needed to be done differently, so that different results could be achieved.

## The Permit

I like a good plan. Whether it is construction, a vacation, teaching a math lesson or beginning a new project, I want to



have something in place that can be followed when questions arise. I really dislike it when I've begun something, and then halfway through, say "Oops, I should have done that first." Just imagine, when God created everything, if He had made all the animals on the third day, and then they die because they have nothing to eat; or if He had made all the sea creatures BEFORE He made the waters. "Oops!"

Before we started the school, I wanted to have a solid plan in place...not every detail, but I figured that a year of planning would be just about right so that we could have a good start to the school. So after two months of conversational research, I visited the district educational office to find out what requirements were needed for the school. I had a lovely chat with a young lady in charge of the private school division. After maybe an hour of talking in English, she informed me that since the land was titled and the building built, I could go ahead and plan on starting the school the coming year, and classes would start in June. (This later became a favorite strategy whenever I wanted something, speak in English long enough until the Filipino got a "nosebleed," as they would



say, or suffered from speaking too much English, and approved my request.)

JUNE! That was three months away! There was no way that I could find and hire teachers, enroll students, decide on curriculum, purchase furniture and equipment, and, and and...! But, the other option was to allow another year of students to drop out and not attend school. It seemed that God wanted the school to start, and he wanted it to start now! I, and my plans, just needed to get out of the way. I was going to be launching a brand new ship, and then building it after we launched. The metaphor I had always joked about was now the next three years of my life.

Over the next three months, we compiled the necessary documents, wrote down the briefest outline of a plan, hired the teachers, enrolled the students, and received a permit to operate just before classes began in June, 2016. Many of the decisions made were intentional, and many were made to simply keep the ship afloat until the resources needed could catch up to us.



## The Recipe

Arriving on site, it was becoming evident that God was clearly in control of the school, and He had all the ingredients ready for its success. The community was small, nestled in a narrow river valley between two ridges that led to the peak of Mt.



Malasimbo, 1300 meters above the surrounding sea. But there were plenty of children, many of which had dropped out of school for various reasons, and more that were struggling to overcome the obstacles of attending school regularly. There were also teachers in the area, complete with educational degrees in each of the needed disciplines. The school was already built, a beautiful 3-story building nestled under the protection of the mountain with 10 rooms, gym, stage and multi-purpose room. The financial support was available through the Threads of Hope ministry that continued to operate on the campus. He was just asking me to coordinate the combination of ingredients and start the school.

We knew we needed to start small with something manageable and build success from there. We decided to open the first year with a maximum of 44 students in grades 7 and 8. We could only allow 22 per grade because we couldn't fit more than 11 tables in the math/science room. The year started with 40 students. We had a few

more inquires for grade 7, but stopped accepting students after hitting the 22 max. Of those 40 students the first year, over 30% were “out-of-school youth.” Several were 17 and 18 years old, excited to start school again without as many obstacles. Many of these did not succeed, as regular school attendance was too difficult when they had been independent for several years.



We had five employees to begin the school year: four teachers and an office manager. My wife would teach the music classes twice a

week. Every teacher taught at least two subjects, and then covered one of the special classes. It was a lot of planning, but could be done with a small number of students. If we had only started with grade 7, it would have been easier on the teachers, but half their day would be unscheduled, and it would take us an extra year to have a complete school, so we started with two grades. The following year we had to add staff for the 60 plus students.

Traditionally, students stayed in one room, and the teachers traveled to them, but ACTS adopted a more American high school approach. This allowed each teacher to have their own room, and set it up as desired for maximum impact on learning of the content. Also, it allowed students the opportunity to get up and move at

least once each hour, providing much needed physical activity, and some supervised social interaction with friends. These two benefits outweighed the traditional model.

By starting with two grades, and those students moving up each year, we only drew a few students from the nearest public



school the first year. This helped to establish a good relationship with them, and keep them from resenting us. In following years, students entered in grade 7 from our local elementary, which did not interfere with their normal operations. In fact, they appreciated having us there, because it helped to reduce class sizes in the public school from the normal 50 or 60 students. Later, they appreciated us even more when students who were not successful in the public school were able to apply to attend ACTS. We accepted them after reconciling any current situations, even without a “good moral” certificate from the school, as long as they agreed to meet our expectations. Sometimes this required a behavior plan to monitor the student’s success and not carry over bad habits, but it was manageable.

At the start of each year, we intentionally did not advertise our school, or conduct an enrollment campaign like most private schools. This was because our intent was to

educate the local students in the community and members of the church, who already knew about us. It wasn't until the third year that we even put a sign on the school, and that was to meet regulations for accreditation. Slow growth of one extra class and a few teachers each year allowed us to build success, and not be overwhelmed by huge transitions.

Beyond supervising teachers and the office staff and duties the first year, I also served to set up the technology, facility and maintenance. These efforts were rough and several failures were encountered, but allowed the school to slowly grow until the budget could accommodate additional staff members to assist with these duties. God specifically provided a computer technician before we



planned to hire one, but when he showed up and said he was willing to help, we didn't turn him away!

## The Teachers

To advertise for teachers, we used every available resource that we could with the budget we had available. We used Facebook. There was no nice website on which to place an advertisement. TV ads and radio ads were available, but costly, and I had zero idea how to go about doing so, and it was not something on which I wanted to spend my limited time. So we made a Facebook post, and asked everyone to share it with their friends in the Philippines and around the world. I answered several inquiries from people living abroad, but in the end, God brought employees who lived nearby. And it was the best solution, as we later learned. Our office manager had worked for the Department of Education in Manila, but was back to help care for her father who was in poor health. One teacher was a bracelet maker that attended our church, who had not yet found a job. Another had taught small groups in Manila, but not her own classroom, and she now lived with her family just down the road. The other two teachers came from my contact at the municipal office. He happened to work in the Department of Labor,



and happened to have a list of teachers looking for a job, one of which was his son.

One of the challenges that we faced was lack of experience. Apart

from my wife and I, no one had experience doing the job they were hired to do. They had the college degree and some practice, but no



real hands-on experience. This situation required us to do some staff training. And since we couldn't find any available in the area, we did it ourselves. During the first year, it became clear that the inexperience was also a blessing. There were no bad habits to overcome, there was no pre-determined way of doing things. All the staff members were willing to combine their prior experience with the professional development I gave, and try new things. Some of the requests were new, and unfamiliar, but the teachers were willing and attempted to do their best. Not everything was new. There was no way I could completely change their world, and ask them to teach in a way that was familiar to me in just a few months' time. So we picked a few key items, had a common understanding on certain things, and the rest was left to their traditional model. I could not have been more proud of these rookie teachers for the effort they put forth, and the way they worked together to accomplish the task set before us. In particular, I remember right after I hired the teachers, we had a brief meeting together, before their official first day of work. When the meeting was over, I went back to the office to continue paperwork. An hour later, I looked out and all of them were still sitting at the table, discussing



ideas and planning some special activities to accomplish the ideas I had just shared. At that moment, I KNEW we would be successful.



## The Facility

We had a beautiful building and campus, but zero furniture or supplies with which to teach. This was a major decision and obstacle to overcome.



The decision was significant because the furniture I purchased would dramatically affect the budget for start-up and years to come. I was more fortunate than most private schools because Threads of Hope had a budget set aside for us to use. I could purchase what I needed right away to start classes. So, what materials should I purchase? I was familiar with public schools in the United States, where I had the resources necessary. But I would not be able to purchase everything, as that would go over the budget. Another consideration was that none of the teachers were familiar with the classroom design that I was, and many items would likely sit unused.

However, the items that I observed in many schools were wooden student desks and tiny chalkboards. The desks were less expensive to purchase, but often fell apart after a few years of termite munching. The chalkboards were less expensive, but created additional dust in an open-air classroom and limited the performance of the teacher.

Because we had a budget available, I opted for higher quality furniture that was more expensive initially, but a lower cost over its lifetime since they would last longer.

Since the classrooms were small, I provided a fewer number of items than I was accustomed to, but covered the basic needs of each teacher. Every classroom was set up with:

- \*Metal teacher desk
- \*Metal drawers that locked, which could be put under the desk or rolled beside it
- \*Teacher roller chair
- \*Metal cabinet with storage and file drawers that locked
- \*Wooden, painted bookshelf
- \*One or two 4' x 8' magnetic whiteboards
- \*Bulletin board
- \*32 or 40-inch TV, with HDMI cord
- \*3 electric fans
- \*22 student armchair desks, or 11 partner tables with chairs (the max we could fit)
- \*Teacher laptop
- \*Teacher desk items: Calculator, ruler, tape dispenser, stapler, ball pens and markers
- \*Classroom set of textbooks for each course

That's it. Every item provided was utilized almost every single day. Teachers were familiar with every item, and if there was a time in the future that I was not in leadership, these were the items that would be requested by the teachers for their classroom. Not just what I wanted, but what they needed.



Now, getting these items was a different story. We lived on an island, and it was expensive to ship things from Manila. We could shop online, but it was very difficult to get the items we wanted. There was very little available in our local municipality, so we drove an hour and a half over the mountain and around the coast to the regional capital and looked around until we found a store that carried a few of the office items, and could order the rest. No extra shipping charges, as long we could pick it up at the store and get it to the school. This much we could manage with the ministry vehicle. It took a few trips, but that was fine, since the order arrived in pieces.

Some things we could not find, like tables for the math and science classroom, or the technology classroom. So we made them. And we turned it into project based learning for the students in technology class. They learned to take the measurements from the blueprint, cut the plywood and the metal pipe. They observed the welding and gluing



of a smooth laminate top. They painted the finished metal. We created five different stations that students rotated around to,

and took part in each one. Each of the teachers was responsible for one station, and partnered with a construction expert, most of whom were dads of the students. It was a great start to the investigation of careers and project-based learning that would become a central theme for the school in the years to come.

It had always been a strong philosophical point of mine that it was the responsibility of the administration to provide teachers with the tools they needed to do their job. I simply wasn't prepared for the gratitude of the teachers when I provided them so little (in my mind). I repeatedly told them that the difficult part was still to come, and that they needed these bare essentials to start their task.

## The Board

The best option we had to start a school that accomplished what we wanted was a private school. It would be a non-stock, non-profit corporation with all paperwork filed and approved through the government, and that meant a board of directors. The first advice given about a board was to keep it tight, in the family, so to speak, where the dad was the President, mom and daughter were members, along with a few carefully selected church members who always followed the leadership of the head family. But this would not lead us to our final goal: a sustainable school governed by the local community invested in its success. So we reached out. First, we talked to the pastor of the church at the ministry site. Since the school was an outreach of the church, it was vital that they had a voice on the board. We also reached out to another local pastor. He was not able to, but his wife had regularly been involved in school activities and was happy to serve on the board. We also talked to a local businesswoman. She had long ago pledged to assist the school in getting started. Since she was an attorney, she would be immensely helpful in providing support to the school. Finally, we talked to the bracelet makers. They were the ones who had labored and prayed for the start of the school. It would be their children that would attend the school. We wanted them to have a voice in the



governance of the school. Since the bracelet makers were organized into groups, each with a leader, we asked which leaders would be recommended to be members of the board. Two names were given, and those ladies were honored to represent the families of the community. We now had a 5-member board, and met the minimum requirements for government regulations. We submitted the paperwork required to start the school as private corporation and it was approved. All plans and ideas were carefully presented to the board for consideration, and the first steps were taken so that the school could open immediately.

A key feature of the board was that although the 5 members intentionally represented diversity from the community, they had a single-ness of mind. Each wanted a school where children could come to get a quality education, and to learn about Christ. This unity was represented in the statement of faith for the school. All members of the board agreed to the statement, and requested that all employees also confirm their commitment. This kept the central focus on the Christian faith, and was the foundation of the school. A variety of preferences were held by board members and employees, but they could all agree on these core statements about who Christ was and our relation to Him.

The future held lots of opportunity for growth by the board in governance of the school, but for now, we were able to continue stepping forward on the path laid out for us.



## The Name

One of the first tasks for the school board to agree on was the name of the school. It was a simple task that could have been completed with a simple name, however I remember my school leadership professor encouraging us not to miss the opportunity to establish the climate and culture of the school with a key theme. I



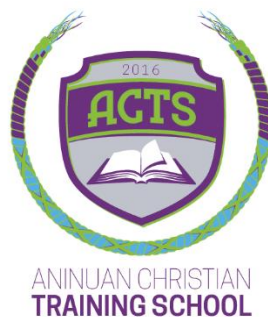
wanted something more than Aninuan Christian School. Something that spoke to who were, and why we were there. Something that could be easily transferred into logos as we sought to establish the school. I wanted to capture the promise I was making to parents in helping them to easily find a job after graduation, to teach them about God, and to build some self-resiliency in helping them to not marry early. I wanted the school name to clearly share that we approached things differently to go beyond a quality education, and to strongly impact student in their future and the development of their community.

Then I remembered a message from our church back home. It wasn't given by our regular pastor, but by a missionary who worked with the international students at the local university. He was an intellectual who always provoked thought, and always went over the normal dismissal time. During this particular message, his theme

resonated with me as a math teacher. He said, “Don’t try, train!” He continued to say that if you try, you may give up if you are not successful right away. But if you train, the focus shifts from giving an attempt to developing a life-long habit. These habits take time to develop, and even good habits are at risk of being dropped. So don’t try. Train to become what you want to be.

This was the message I wanted to convey to students, teachers, parents and community members. At our school, we would train. Students would be encouraged to continue after they had tried and failed to be successful. Students would be trained for success beyond simply a quality education. We would help them to develop habits that would stick with them for their life-time. We would train them for success in any situation they encountered, whether they remained on the island as a tricycle driver their entire life, or they built a career where they worked with people from around the world. Biblical, educational and career training would be imbedded into their experience at our school.

So, we selected the name Aninuan Christian Training School. The name told us where, Who, and what. But it also told us how. Our hope was that through our school, students and teachers would come to learn why: why God has created us, why He sent His Son to die for us, and why we needed a quality education, so that we could serve Him in any career we chose. The



name also had the added benefit of creating a recognizable acronym of ACTS, which carried the subliminal message that our actions as a creation signified an understanding of Who He is, and that our actions speak loudly about our belief in Him.

## The Curriculum

This was one of the most difficult and significant decisions that was needed to be made before classes began. What was taught to students would convey to them what we felt was important. Research tells us that the single biggest impact upon student performance is the quality of the teacher, but what we ask that teacher to teach is a partner that goes hand in hand with their success.

As a Christian school, we were interested in offering a Christian curriculum. This was an area that I was unfamiliar with, being a product of public schools. We knew that such curriculum was available, but there were many details that did not make this option viable. We did not have the time to review and assess curriculum before starting classes. Such a task required a team of experienced teachers, and all of our staff were fresh graduates who were figuring out how to set up their first classroom. We also had a limited budget that prevented us from purchasing these materials. And even if we could purchase them, the time required to receive them and the dependency on people and companies overseas would limit the effectiveness of Filipino leaders in the future. Plus, many of these texts were written toward an American audience, and would not achieve our goal of overcoming Filipino dependency. We



did finally hear of a local Christian curriculum option, but were never able to secure complete copies of all subjects for all grade levels.

The remaining option was to adopt the new K-12 curriculum map that just recently been released by the Department of Education. The benefit here is that this was something my teachers were familiar with. They would not need to learn completely new material AND how to teach it in their first year. That made the plan achievable. All we needed to do was find resources to teach with, including textbooks. Fortunately, another private school in our municipality was willing to let us borrow their textbooks, evaluate them, and choose which company we wanted to order from. We even got the contact number of the sales rep. Even though they had a difficult following up with us, I was able to drive to the main office and pick up our first order of textbooks.



## The Schedule

The K-12 Curriculum map called for eight classes to be taught in grade 7-10: Math, Science, English, Filipino, Araling Panlipunan, (Social Studies), Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, (Values), TLE, (Technology and Livelihood Education) and MAPEH, (Music, Art, PE, Health). I had the philosophy that government requirements were a minimum standard that we should meet and surpass. Other topics were just as critical for us to achieve our mission: Bible, Computers and Career Exploration topped our list, as well as advising and clubs.

There were traditional standards for school operations. It began at 7:00 AM, and went until around 4:00, with an



hour of open lunch where most students went home or into the shops to buy food. The long day allowed us time to do the extra activities we wanted to include, but I was concerned about safety and attendance from an open lunch. After discussion with the PTA, we agreed to close the lunch, requiring all students to stay on campus. Years later, we offered to open it, but parents said their students were safer because of the closed lunch, and it allowed them to remain at work during the day, if they were fortunate enough to have work.

To create a community with a common focus, every morning was started together. Staff and students were required to gather in the Multi-Purpose area when the bell rang at 7:00. And yes, it was an actual bell that I hit 3 times with socket wrench designed for the grass trimmer. Per tradition, students gathered in a line of boys and a line of girls for each of the grades. We had a special call to attention by saying: "It's time to Honor", students responded with "Serve", and we all said together "Let's Grow". After that, it was quiet and I could proceed with a good morning welcome, brief reminders for the day, and a 5-minute devotion and prayer. We continued with the traditional stretching, led by two students. On Monday mornings, we had a Flag raising ceremony, to which we added the Christian flag, Bible, and school motto. This motto came from my years as principal of Walnut Elementary, where we raised our right hand and said, "I am respectful no matter what is happening around me." The phrase worked well as a reminder to students, and was frequently brought into discipline discussions with students. This entire activity took 15 minutes from start to finish, but was a vital part of establishing a culture where we acted out our honor to God, country, care for our bodies, learning for the day and our interactions with others. Each day was concluded in a similar manner that lasted 5 minutes: we



repeated the call to attention, made announcements, prayed and sent the students home. On Fridays, we included the traditional flag-lowering ceremony. This beginning and ending ceremony provided a sandwich of togetherness. In between, we split up into individual tasks and studies, but we always started and ended together as a community of teachers and students.



The schedule for the day majorly followed the requirements for each class. Math, Science, English and Filipino meet for an hour four

times a week. TLE and AP met three times a week for an hour, while EsP met twice and MAPEH had one hour for each of the four components. The second hour of EsP was a corporate time that doubled as our chapel time, where local pastors and staff shared a message with the students that included the values from the EsP curriculum. Time was available each week for an hour of Bible and an hour of computer. These curriculums had to be developed, so all grades studied the same material the first year, and a new year of curriculum was developed each following year. This made the task of curriculum creation manageable and fit the model of adding a grade level each year.

Since we only had 40 students the first year, Fridays were devoted to career exploration where a three-hour block



was available for a specific focus. During the year students listened to and got hands-on experience in many different career paths. In later years, this model changed to project-based learning in a single grade level since it was too difficult to organize special activities every week for 100 students. The cross-grade level interaction was great the first two years, but too difficult logistically to maintain with the small staff size.

Other details changed each year with the availability of new staff and time available for special activities. Home room was added, with specific days assigned for time in the library, clubs, social-emotional development and class meetings. An intervention time was available for re-teaching concepts in core classes.

The last 15 minutes of lunch was designated cleaning time. Every student was assigned to an area for cleaning. This traditional activity matched well with our desire to have students learn life and professional skills needed in the workplace, show pride and ownership in the school, and keep maintenance costs low. Cleaning of the comfort rooms by students was kept at a light level, and maintenance staff did the deep cleaning after school. Long ago I had heard the phrase that school schedules were driven by Beans, Bells and Buses. I added



the philosophy that what is contained in the schedule is a reflection of what is important. Each year, the schedule was modified to achieve the greatest results with the resources available to us. When possible, flexible scheduling was included to allow block scheduling. Math and Science in grades 7 and 8 were back to back, so those teachers could do a larger project through team teaching when they wanted to. The same for English and Filipino, so that a larger project could be done in language or literature. Special TLE projects or career investigation could happen by combining classes or Friday. None of this was required, but available to encourage initiative by the teacher.

## The Projects

As a math teacher and problem-solver, I always saw the benefit to the Constructivist philosophy of teaching, but knew the reality of needing to cover all concepts within a given time frame. Project-based learning was an excellent method of giving students the opportunity to construct their own learning at specific times during the year, while covering all concepts through Direct Instruction the rest of the time.



When the school had 75 students, we switched from doing projects as an entire school to class-based projects. The opportunity was available to all classes, but intentionally developed in a few. Art classes combined with TLE to create giant letters made from plywood and putty. Science, English and Math combined together for a statistics unit. Filipino and Computers

combined to create videos. The intentional projects were developed in TLE. In grades 7 and 8, students studied different areas each quarter to gain skills and knowledge with a little application. In grades 9 and 10, special projects were designed for a lot of application and real-world experience.

The most visible of these projects was the bahay kubo, (gazebo). I met with students at the beginning of the

quarter as the “owner,” telling the students I needed a kubo built. It needed to accommodate 22 students for a meeting, be



attractive and fit the environment, strong against weather, and last for at least 10 years. It could be made of any materials, but the budget was only P10,000, (\$200). I showed them the location set aside for building, and gave them a completion date. There would be a penalty if they went over time, and no additional funds if they went over budget. But if they were under budget, I would give them the extra funds for a celebration.

It was then up to the students, under the guidance of their teacher and with the assistance of other staff members, to research possible designs, study building materials, create an architectural and orthographic plan, generate a bill of materials to match the budget, and recruit any additional building experts as volunteers on the project. A timeline must be created and was reported on regularly. Each student was assigned a role on the team, but worked together to accomplish the project.

The greatest difficulty of these projects was getting the local expert help to only advise and not do all the work themselves. Children in school were not encouraged to be “labor” in a building project. This was a counter-cultural concept that took guidance. I shared with the students

and staff that my engineer brothers credited their labor experience on the farm and in construction with the understanding to help them be excellent at their jobs. As a math teacher, I was better able to teach applications because I had a variety of experience. If the students wanted to be engineers, designers, business owners, etc., then they would benefit from having the hands-on experience, as well as the planning and supervision skills.

The students loved it. They figured out that climbing the mountain and cutting the bamboo themselves would



save them P200 on each piece. And talking with the owner and requesting a discount got an extra P20 per piece. This hard work kept them on budget with extra left over for their celebration when finished. When they were done, they had a beautiful structure for their class to use when needed, and a place to hang out for “bonding time” before and after school. And you know what? You never saw a structure better cared for by teenage students, once they hung the sign with their class name, and a list of usage expectations.

These projects allow students in their early high school years to gain experiences that often don't come until they have a job. And then, only a few experience them. The need for research, new skill development, problem-

solving, budgeting, project management and teamwork all come together during this activity, and prepare students for career opportunities that normally would not be open to them.









## The Status Quo

A tremendous consideration of coming as a “foreigner” into a different culture to complete a project was



awareness of the local culture, and the culture I brought with me. With the goal of building a sustainable school led by local people, I needed to learn about how things were done, what was valued and what was accepted. I knew that as a follower of Christ, there would be certain practices that I would not be able to encourage, and to achieve a different result than other schools, we would need to do some things differently. To decide which things would be supported and which things would be done differently would take careful consideration.

Aninuan is located in “the province.” This is a term used by those in Manila, a metropolis of 16 million, for any area of the Philippines that was not Manila. Aninuan was certainly in the province, apart from a thin strip on the coast where beach resorts and tourist attractions existed. As a Kansas boy, this suited me just fine. I enjoyed the green paradise of mountains and ocean with amenities within a short drive. It was a slower pace of life, with opportunity to spend time on things that mattered most. Although I enjoyed it, my physical appearance, and my desire to improve things probably grouped me with those referred to as “capitalist,” although I never heard locals

refer to me that way. The term was not a compliment, and for good reason. A capitalist, according to my interpretation, is one who places more value on making money and achieving success than keeping good relationships and properly honoring those in authority. Although the locals desired to have a job and support their family, they never placed this above interpersonal connections.



This resulted in some unique cultural differences. People operated on “Filipino time,” meaning that it was acceptable to show up any time

after the agreed time, making sure family needs came first. Students would not come to school if they did not have a clean, complete uniform, pesos for lunch, or there was a special occasion at home, like a birthday. Concerns were not directly addressed between individuals, so no one was embarrassed. Success and wealth were demonstrated by outward appearances, and physical labor was looked down upon. Tasks were completed in a group, and people seldom traveled without a *kasama*, (companion).

Many of these were admirable traits, but limited the opportunity to learn, and would be detrimental in a professional setting. We determined to share with students that they would need to be knowledgeable about

expectations in different settings. If they were in a professional setting, they needed to be on time, respond directly to others and communicate clearly if they were absent.

So we set about setting expectations in the school that were similar to a professional setting, so that our students could be successful. This did not mean their actions at home were bad, but different than those at work. School started precisely on time every day. Late students met with the office staff before going to class. The school schedule was closely followed, although bells were not used for precise dismissal, allowing teachers to remain in authority. Students were asked to remain in an assigned seat, rather than transferring desks constantly to spend time close to friends. Assignments were to be individually completed, rather than copied from other students. Silence was required when a speaker was sharing, rather than continuing personal conversations.



Teaching professional expectations allowed students to be successful in any environment they encountered. If they lived and

worked at home, they knew what to do from the local culture. If they traveled to Manila or abroad, they could be successful in professional settings. And some developed that incredible combination of the best Filipino traits

combined with professional skills that were appreciated by all cultures.

A specific strategy to accomplish this was to repeatedly refer to the school's vision: Preparing students to serve the Lord in any career they chose. If the students entered ministry as a pastor or missionary, they could serve the Lord with the skills and education they had received. If they entered the professional world, they would be equipped to learn the skills they needed. If they stayed in the community and harvested coconuts, caught fish or drove a tricycle, those could all be done to serve the Lord, and He was pleased with that, even though it was looked down upon by the locals.

A full shift to the culture will take time, perhaps a generation. But it was clear that changes were happening when parents explained that their students were choosing to come to school even when they did not have lunch or money. Students still came, even though their uniform was incomplete because it was not dry from the rain. Some students even came on their birthday and celebrated after school. These changes in their normal procedures made it clear they were committed our common goal of a quality education.

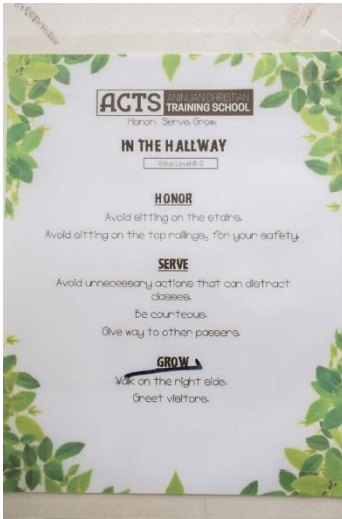


## The First Day

Training students to meet expectations is not something that can be achieved by a perfectly crafted list of rules posted in the front of the classroom, complete with consequences. Teaching expectations, especially those different than the culture or social class, must be trained from the first day. This concept comes from Ruby Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty, and PBIS models that describe how schools operate on the values of the middle class. If students do not come from the middle class, then the expectations must be taught immediately so that students can be successful. When the previous statement is true of 100% of students at the school, this is a culture shift, and must be done intentionally.

On the first day, there are no regularly scheduled classes. Instead, a large portion of time is dedicated to teaching expectations in the various areas of the school. We chose a rotating schedule where one staff member was the expert of a specific area, and students rotated to them. Students were taught the expectation on entering the school, assembling together each morning. They heard how they should enter the office, and when they could access the library. They discussed proper behavior in the hallway, and how to use the interesting structures in the comfort room. Guidelines for participation in





the classroom, computer lab and gym were role-played. Every possible unique environment was discussed in detail the first day. Posters were made for each of the areas to remind students throughout the year, and were reviewed quarterly. They weren't a list of rules and consequences, but rather examples of how to meet expectations. The most fun

part was watching staff members demonstrating the non-examples, leaving a permanent memory in the students of seeing a teacher breaking the uniform guidelines or not following procedures.

Procedures and individual classroom rules were discussed the second day by each teacher in their own rooms. It made the impression that we had specific expectations for all people that applied throughout the school. Rules were simple and few. In fact, there were three school rules: Honor, Serve and Grow. These three rules came about during a week of staff development where we discussed expectations for students. All the expectations were listed by the staff on sticky notes, and then grouped according to concept. We left at the end of the day with the challenge to name the groups. I will forever be grateful to Tim Swanson, a missionary serving as Instructional Coach to the teachers, for coming in the next morning with the words Honor, Serve and Grow as the group names. The

simplicity and depth of these three school rules launched a new campaign that focused the school on why we were there. These three rules marked a major philosophy of our training model. God used 10 rules for all interactions of people in the world, we would use only 3 for our school. We focused more on teaching and training expectations in a positive, pro-active manner that supported the culture of relationships, than controlling through a long list of rules.

## The Training Model

Training expectations involved more than interactions of students. It also applied to parents and teachers. To clearly communicate with parents and the community, several documents were created to describe how we were operating things at the school.

All parents and new students were required to attend an orientation on these documents, and only allowed to enroll if they agreed to our instructional method. A Purpose, Vision, and a Mission statement was created to clearly articulate why we had started a school, and what we hoped to accomplish. This was furthered detailed in the ACTS



Pyramid, a visual representation of how we went beyond minimum government requirements and intentionally taught career skills through TLE, and Biblical concepts through EsP and Bible classes. Students would never be required or pushed to change their personal beliefs, but they would be exposed daily to the Bible, career development and soft skills. These soft skills were clearly articulated through the Core Abilities. Specific areas of interpersonal skills that were approved by employers from the area as excellent qualities in any employee. Practice of the skills would be implemented throughout the school year, and recorded on the grade card, they were so



important. The four core values of DepEd were accommodated into the 9 Core Abilities at ACTS. A Learning Compact listed



the expectations of every student, parent and staff member at ACTS. This compact was signed and kept in a permanent file for future use, if the expectations were forgotten. The schedule was also reviewed so that parents knew what students were spending their time on, and when they needed to be at school.

Curriculum maps provided more detail for the student studies. Beyond the DepEd K-12 Curriculum, we added a TLE, Bible and Computer Curriculum Map. We also discussed Stackable Credentials. Our hope was that when students graduated, we would have several credential they have earned in soft skills, technology and English that would assist them in entering college or the workforce.

Once we clearly communicated expectations to parents and students, it was important to help the teachers be successful. The world of education is vast and can be overwhelming when all aspects are considered. To assist the teachers, specific expectations were listed in Academic, Behavior, Classroom Management and Curriculum. Out of all the available resources, philosophies and strategies a few select items were chosen. These were usually taken from Best Practices that

were research based, but some were chosen from experience to match our school mission. Educators reading through the expectations will recognize elements from Professional Learning communities, PBiS models, Differentiated Instruction, Formative Assessments, Mastery Learning, Harry Wong's First Days of School, and others too numerous to mention or sources forgotten in the past 20 years in an educational setting. These few select items allowed teachers to implement best teaching practices as part of a community without getting bogged down in the excess educational jargon. Every year, the Training Model is reviewed with all staff members, and new teachers receive specific instruction on implementing the model. After two years of implementation, additional expectations are given to veteran staff, and more in-depth processes are implemented. Of course, each teacher is free to implement teaching strategies and instructional design that best fits their class, but the core training model sets a minimum expectation and participation in an educational community that is working to overcome traditional models of teaching that are counter-productive to the goals we have set as a school. The training model and supporting documents are attached at the end of the book for investigation, rather than a complete description here in this narrative.



## The Management

School leadership is responsible for the oversight of all the different components discussed here. The challenge, as discussed by the International ministry leader in another message that went way overtime, is the Biblical principle of holding two seemingly opposite concepts in balance without being pulled off balance by either one. Just like the Christian must hold the concepts of grace and works in balance with each other, the school leader must be in balance between business operations and teaching pedagogy. Tightly supervising specific base criteria while loosely allowing a novice teacher time to develop. Lovingly forging relationships with students and staff while having firm discipline.

I loved the communication concept presented by Rick Dufour about deciding which things in the school would be loose and which would be tight. I would be tight about the schedule, but loose about transitions between classes. I would be tight about teachers having lesson plans, but loose about which model these used. Some procedures could be implemented quickly and stay in place for the duration of the year. Others would be put in place, but never take full effect because the concept was too countercultural for students and teachers.

Sometimes,  
traditional



practices were too embedded for change to take place, like grades, for example. In the Philippines, grades were not



passing until at a 75%. This is 15% higher than the 60% I was accustomed to in the US. We had several discussions about this when students were not passing a class, and I shared my philosophy of allowing a student to fail when they refused to do their work. This was a difficult and counter cultural concept. So, I discussed grade weighting with the teachers, so that the final grade of the student was a true reflection of their achievement. The grades I calculated never matched. Then I finally discovered that there was a multiplier at the end of the spreadsheet for the grades. This bumped student grades up past the 75%, when the student had a low score, but did not change much if the student had a high score. This went against all my beliefs of students earning the grades they receive. I wanted to change the practice. In all our discussions, we could never get there, and I always ended up being frustrated. Finally, I came to a justification. Since the passing grade was a full 15% more than I was accustomed to, having a multiplier at the end made some sort of sense so that a large percent of students did not fail. I would still prefer to mathematically calculate the grade, but could allow the traditional method to stand.

Working with a young staff with limited experience meant that my expectations of them needed to adapt. There were specific things I needed to keep close supervision of and maintain high expectations, but there were other areas that I could allow gradual growth in. The overall result was a happy staff who knew they were working to meet high expectations, and happy students who knew that their hard work might someday make it easier for them to get a job.

To completely develop a culture where we were all working toward a common goal, and hoping that someday the school would be



under Filipino leadership, meant lots of discussions. The decisions that were made were discussed with everyone so they knew what we were doing, and why. When questions came up, I wanted everyone to know what decision I would make, based upon a pattern of decision-making that had been explained previously. I wanted the culture of the school to be known so that I was not the sole person in charge of the school, but that the community of staff members worked together to help students achieve the goals set before them, and to get them back on track if they were not meeting expectations.

In the office, we departed again from the traditional model. Paperwork and documentation were supposed to

be above all, but as long as I knew that we were doing the right things, the paperwork and reporting took a back seat. Even



though the counselor and librarian were supposed to be fully certified with their own operation manual, that took a back seat to helping all students enjoy the library of great books we had, and making sure that we discussed students who were having difficulties in school. In the future, perhaps, there will be a large enough budget for additional staff to complete these tasks after we have the core of an effective school established.

## The Free Lunch

Early the first year of the school it became clear that home situations for students were still the same as before. We were not affecting the local economy in the first year by providing a school. Students still were hungry and often stayed home from embarrassment, and their school uniform was the nicest article of clothing they owned. A volunteer missionary offered to arrange the funding for a free lunch offered at the school. Most people wouldn't think twice about offering a free lunch to students who were hungry, but I was cautious.

I had recently read a book titled Toxic Charity that detailed situations of good intentions that resulted in creating dependency and a loss of traditional customs. I knew that most of the kids were fed at home, even though it was difficult, and I did not want to create a situation that encouraged parents to relinquish their provision for their children. I did not want them to come to rely on the school for food, as well as education. I could also envision a mass exodus from the public to our school if we started to provide a free lunch, along with all the other school needs we tried to assist with. Some of our students were not cared for by their parents, and it broke my heart, but I knew that having the school take over parent responsibility was



not helping in the long run.

I was also concerned about the method by which students would receive lunch. They already stayed at home if they did not have food, I did not want to add to their embarrassment by some receiving free lunch because they



could not provide their own. I was sure this would happen, because I had

offered to buy lunch, or share my lunch, many times, and was turned down. In this culture, I thought it would bring too much shame on those participants.

I wasn't able to justify the opportunity of choice and need for responsibility. Several of the students sitting without lunch had used their money to purchase snacks at break time earlier in the day. Providing a free lunch went completely against the opportunity of allowing natural consequences to occur for students who made irresponsible decisions.

Eventually, the idea of a free lunch died because not enough money could be raised. I wish I could say we solved the problem, and that no one at our school goes hungry, but that is not true. We have discussed several ideas, and tried a few, but have not found a complete solution to the problem. At this point, I will say that I would rather see a little hunger, than add to the



dependency. Any charity that is provided will be in emergency situations, and given through love to help promote independence rather than a toxic culture of dependency.

## The Transition

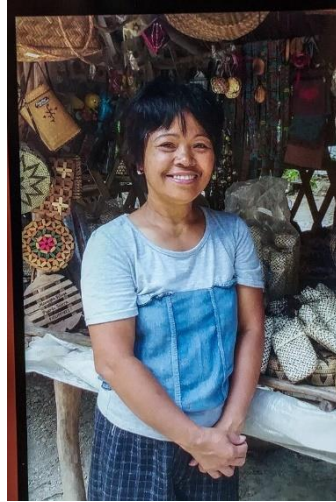
After overseeing the first two years of the school's growth, I knew it was time to start a transition of leadership from myself to the local Filipinos. We had tried to find a principal, but none could be found who was willing, or felt called to continue the ministry. Despite this, I knew it was time to transition. Some of it was personal, and I had a list of about 20 reasons, including the fact that three years of home-schooling was enough for our family.

We set up a Leadership Team of four staff members at the school to take over my duties. Each one had a specific list of duties to perform and manage. One was the office manager, while another was the business manager. The office manager handled all the paperwork and finances in the office. She kept us up to date with required submissions to government agencies and all manner of office related tasks. She was the very first employee of ACTS, and her training in leadership had begun the first day out of necessity, as I needed a translator when speaking to most parents and students. She received firsthand experience on how I conducted all meetings, coordinated with outside agencies, spoke with parents about concerns and talked with students about discipline issues. Each of these was done in a specific fashion, and soon she was



able to handle these issues any time I was out of the office.

The business manager was new to the school, but familiar with the ministry as a volunteer during the summer church camp. She acted as the spokesperson of the school, continuing our community-building efforts. She continued to build processes to assist with office tasks, assisted with



discipline, was a liaison to parents and a project manager. A third was the assistant to the director. I connected with him through his wife, who sold handicraft at the next village. She greatly impressed me each time I interacted with her, and when I heard he had an education degree, I invited them to visit me at the school. I was pleased with his willingness to serve, experience with hands-on skills, and pastor's heart. He assisted me with discipline, taught Bible classes, assisted with TLE projects, and counseled students. The fourth member of the team was our English teacher. She had the most experience as a teacher, was preparing to take master's classes, and showed leadership skills in implementing the teaching philosophies and strategies I had shared over the past two years. She would continue to teach full-time but added the leadership responsibilities.

These four began meeting together with me each week the first two months of school. I made sure that we had a solid start to our third year of school, and then I moved my

family to Manila. For the remainder of the year, I came back almost every week for two days. This required the Leadership Team to take responsibility for much of the daily management of the school. When I came down, they would report to me any concerns or developments. Then I would take care of the tasks I needed to take care of: paying salaries, serious discipline issues and parent meetings, outreach and development. It was a tough year for all of us. I struggled with 10-plus hours required for the round trip and being away from my family a night or two each week. My time with teachers was very limited, and it seemed like some days were just a continuous string of meetings. I disliked the struggle I saw the team going through, but just like when I was teaching math, I knew that it was necessary for true learning to take place. I was slowly taking away the scaffold support system I had built around them, and was requiring them to stand on their own.

At the end of the year, I moved my family back to the US. We had been away from our home for four years, and it was time for a furlough for the physical, mental and emotional health of our family. I could no longer travel to the school each week, so we continued meeting through video chat and messaging. The team also morphed slightly. Our business manager was not able to stay with the school, so we



hired a new English teacher and moved the Lead Teacher into the office, with only a few classes to teach in our new senior high school. This team of three was now fully responsible for the daily management of the school. I still functioned as the Director of the school, but targeted my work to specific tasks that could be completed through the computer, or through messaging. We are now preparing for the Moving Up ceremony at the end of the year, and I am so pleased with continued success of the school. They have continued to operate all the systems and procedures we had developed together for the smooth management of the school. Several large projects were completed without any assistance from me, and new activities have been developed on their own. I am eager for next year, our fifth, when we will have the first graduating class from the senior high grade 12. Having it completely planned, carried out and presided over by local Filipinos will be a tremendous time of praise for the work God has done in the Aninuan community.

## The Adjustments

Many times during the first three years of the school we had to make adjustments to what we were doing. At one point, students were struggling to complete assignments given by the teachers, so we attempted a Homework Zone.

This concept had come from a program I had helped implement at a previous school and it required students to complete their



homework before going home. Sometimes it took 5 minutes, and sometimes it took an hour, but we had changed homework completion from 50% to 98% with the program. I had even written about it as part of my master's research project. It fit well with our training concept at ACTS, so we implemented it after discussing it at staff meeting several times, and having some professional development over homework. It was not successful. Certainly, we had improvement in completed assignments. Students learned that when teachers gave an assignment, it was to be completed. Teachers learned the value and specific types of homework, and how to clearly communicate expectations about assignments. A version of the program continued for some time, where students did remain after school to complete work, but a tight, complete program was not implemented.

At another point, we had difficulty with students entering the kitchen to get a glass of water. The area was also part of the pastor's apartment. The kitchen was open during break and lunch time, and was operated by the pastor's wife and an assistant separately from the school. We had placed special water filters and dispensers in the school, and asked students to bring their own water bottles rather than the traditional model of one cup being shared by everyone coming to get water. I knew the water filter worked well, because it was how my family got drinking water. Water from any source could go in the top, and pure filtered water came out the spigot, for free. I called them Dreisbach filters, after the missionary who designed it and gave it to me my first month in the country. He had spent his life mentoring men and assisting people with engineering projects, teaching each of them about the true Living Water of Christ. For some reason, the students would not use these filters, and constantly asked for water at the kitchen. And they were never denied. We tried several different procedures, but each of them failed to change the culture because the kitchen staff would not redirect the students to the water filters.



One major successful adjustment came during the transition to the Leadership Team. When traveling to the school one week, I had the report that student behavior

had increased dramatically. After some coaxing, because the team was still shy about reporting concerns, I learned that it had been going on for some time. Teachers had stopped sending students to the office, and some classes were getting out of control. We had just done a major presentation of classroom management, so I was disappointed to see a negative result to that training. We took some time at an upcoming professional development day to discuss the matter. I pushed the teachers to reach the root of the concern, and found that some of the procedures I had put in place were counter-cultural and difficult for the teachers to follow. So we dove into the discussion of culture. We talked about all the different cultures occurring within our school. First of all, students came to us from a Filipino culture and almost all from an extreme poverty culture. Most of the school design was based on middle-class culture so that students could be successful in any situation. We also implemented portions of a professional culture as part of our training program.

And finally, we all came together in a Biblical culture. So we discussed the impact of all these different cultures, and what culture we wanted to



promote at the school. I shared my vision that when people came into our school, it would be like walking into a sweet aroma, it was so evident that we served God here



and designed our school to honor Him. To accomplish this, after much discussion, we agreed that we would teach



Filipino culture and values, except where it did not agree with Biblical concepts. We would also teach in addition to Filipino culture to prepare students for success in career opportunities. To accomplish this, we would modify our procedures to include training time. Training time was something more culturally appropriate that did not have the seriousness of being sent to the office, but at a higher level than the regular classroom management procedures. Training time for a student could be given by a staff member, a peer student when requested by the teacher or the counselor. It was much like the parent strategy of a “re-do”, or even role-playing through a situation. It emphasized expectations and required students to differentiate between when they did, and what was appropriate. The identification of what was inappropriate, and what other options were available matched a growth model for improvement. Behavior was dealt with immediately, and in a training manner that did not remove the student from class for an extended period of time. The student returned to class immediately after role-playing or talking through the situation and identifying what they would do better. Of course, this strategy required maintenance and monitoring for those students

who regularly abused the system, and did not truly grow from the experience. No new expectations were set; they were the same simple guidelines written in the student compact that all students had signed at the beginning of the year. We were just changing, as a school, how we interacted with students when they were not meeting expectations. After

two months of implementation, there had been only three office referrals, and behavior in the classroom was

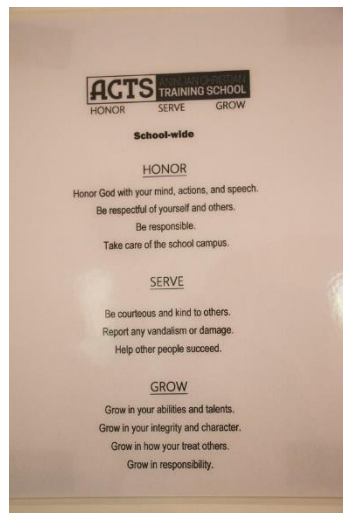


back to an acceptable level. We were tremendously pleased with the results that came through a collaborative effort that drilled down to the culture that was coming into our school, and clearly communicating and training students on the culture that was acceptable at school. We are hoping that this strategy remains a permanent part of the behavior model at ACTS.

## The Behavior Model

Although the behavior model is a part of the larger ACTS Training Model that was discussed previously, there are specific components that are worth focusing on. After seven months of being back in the US on furlough, I have heard too many stories from other educators who have retired early or quit their jobs because of student behavior. It is heart-breaking to see quality educators leave the profession because they feel discipline concerns are not supported by the administration, or to see excellent administrators worn out from supervising teachers who cannot implement effective classroom management. I fear this issue will never fully be removed from any school, but I do believe there are certain components that can be implemented to improve the situation.

To begin, there must be a clearly articulated behavior plan that is in place for the entire school. This must be communicated and agreed to by parents, administration and teachers. Students can be involved in the process, depending upon their age, but the expectations for their behavior should come from the adults. The plan can be more detailed in specific classrooms, according to the style and preference of the



teacher, but it must have the same core as the school-wide plan.

The behavior plan should be taught and reviewed regularly with the students in a proactive manner. When the behavior occurs, it is not the time to discuss the plan, directions are simply given by the teacher, and the learning continues. This requires regular review of the procedures, and proactive expectations given by the teacher before transitions or specific parts of the lesson. The purpose must always be to encourage the success of the students in hitting the target, not hiding or moving the target and mocking the students when they can't hit it. There will always be times when classroom management procedures are not enough, and students need to be sent out, but these should be seldom and specific occasions after the classroom process has been exhausted.

When the students arrived in the office, we had them complete a think sheet. This strategy originated with Ruby Payne's work and had been modified for elementary and high school environments. It served several purposes: students immediately had something to do when arriving in the office and waiting on the administrator. The design of the think sheet put the responsibility for the visit on the student, and identifying what they had done. It also worked well as a communication and documentation tool. The administrator could quickly read the sheet and understand why the student was sent. The sheet was used while processing through what had happened, and listed other acceptable options for the student to choose next

time. It also worked great when communicating with parents what happened. And it was easily filed for future reference for those repeat offenders.



Simply processing through the event was not enough to conclude the incident. And assigning a consequence was not enough to achieve the result we wanted. Restoration and reconciliation must occur. Being sent to the office after disregarding the classroom behavior plan was a serious offense. The relationship with the teacher was broken. Before the student could return to class, they should apologize to the teacher by saying "I'm sorry for ... Next time I will...Will you please forgive me?" If forgiven by the teacher, then the relationship was restored, and the student could return to class the following day, (or break in the day for elementary). This was a process that I never wavered on. Sometimes, a student would sit in the office for a few days until they were ready to accept responsibility for their actions and apologize.

Now sometimes, the student did not feel like they had been treated fairly, or was genuinely confused when they were sent to the office. So I made a trip to see the teacher at the next convenient break. Every once in a while, the teacher said they were exasperated with the student and over-reacted by sending them to the office. In this case,

the teacher would explain themselves to the student, and the teacher would apologize. This was a rare occasion where the student got to see the humanity and responsibility of the teacher, and often strengthened the relationship between the two.

Building a behavior plan on relationships rather than rule-following was often messy, as many relationships are. Sometimes teachers were concerned that the school was too lenient on students and offered too many chances. That was an opportunity to share about God's mercy and grace to us, how none of us would be used by God if everything was based on merit, but rather God often chose to work through those who are weak and most needed His forgiveness. Now of course, this did not mean that students could play the system continuously. We had a point system in place where students were suspended and even expelled when they reached 20 points. The system took active maintenance and supervision from teachers and administration, but was effective in training students to meet expectations and removing them when they refused to do so.

## The Dream

The dream for Aninuan is not simply to have a school that is financially independent and sustainable, but also a community that is healthy and growing by their own efforts, while leaning on the Lord, where:

- Families are strong and opportunities for businesses are promising because there is a quality workforce trained in many different skills and careers.
- Local churches are strong and independently led and supported by local members rather than dependence on foreign partnership.
- Filipino culture is strong and residents are able to show traditional hospitality and friendliness, or politely decline offers that take advantage of their daughters or desperation to work.
- ACTS continues to hire local residents who can then support their families and churches in which they participate.
- Graduates from ACTS have found jobs locally, regionally and abroad while keeping close ties with their families, often serving their communities in various voluntary and professional positions.
- Some students are now leaders in their church, and help to guide a new generation to see the goodness of God.

To accomplish this dream, we were intentional about how we structured the senior high school. We were required to select certain strands to offer students in their pursuit of college and career. We did not pick the strands that were the cheapest, or the easiest to put into place, but we picked ones that we were capable of offering that would help us to achieve our dream. Naturally, we offered the General Academic Strand, designed for any student planning to attend college. This included those who wanted to be teachers, engineers, medical professionals, etc. Then we received approval to offer five additional strands (another time approval may have come after an hour of discussion in English). Computer System Servicing, Cookery, Event Management, Motorcycle/Small Engine Repair and Driving. The computer strand was implemented first, because we had the personnel, space and interest from students. Cookery was not implemented due to lack of interest from students. Motorcycle repair was not offered, because we could not convince a local person to lead the class for us. Not all programs will be offered each year, but the potential is there for students to take their first step in acquiring skills to help them pursue a career.

We have specific plans for these strands. If a student takes cookery and event management, they would be a





tremendous asset in the local community to the tourism trade, not as regular labor, but as a chef or coordinator of special events. Perhaps the beautiful campus could be used to host special training events and weddings, and the profit from these could be used to support the school and church.

If students took the repair and driving course, they would be well on their way to growing skills to be used in engineering, construction, and repair businesses. They would also have skills to work a job while they took classes in college. This is a big dream, and would take lots of work, but the potential is there.

Whether these plans are implemented and successful, or if the Lord leads in a different direction, it will be evident to all that He is following His plan, and those involved are privileged to be His hands and feet in the body of Christ.

Pray for ACTS,  
and that the  
training time  
these students go  
through will help  
them to achieve  
their dreams, and  
to serve the Lord  
well in any career  
they choose.



School Year 2018-2019



All School Photo



