



WORK IMMERSION: REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE AT SENIOR HIGH



Coalitions for Change (CfC) is a centerpiece program of the partnership between the Australian Embassy and The Asia Foundation in the Philippines. CfC encourages civil society, private sector, academe, and government to work together and bring about public policies that contribute to improving the lives of Filipinos and promoting their economic well-being.

CfC focuses on development concerns that are consistent with the Philippine government's agenda: promoting economic growth, reducing vulnerabilities, improving education outcomes, and advocating for effective governance.

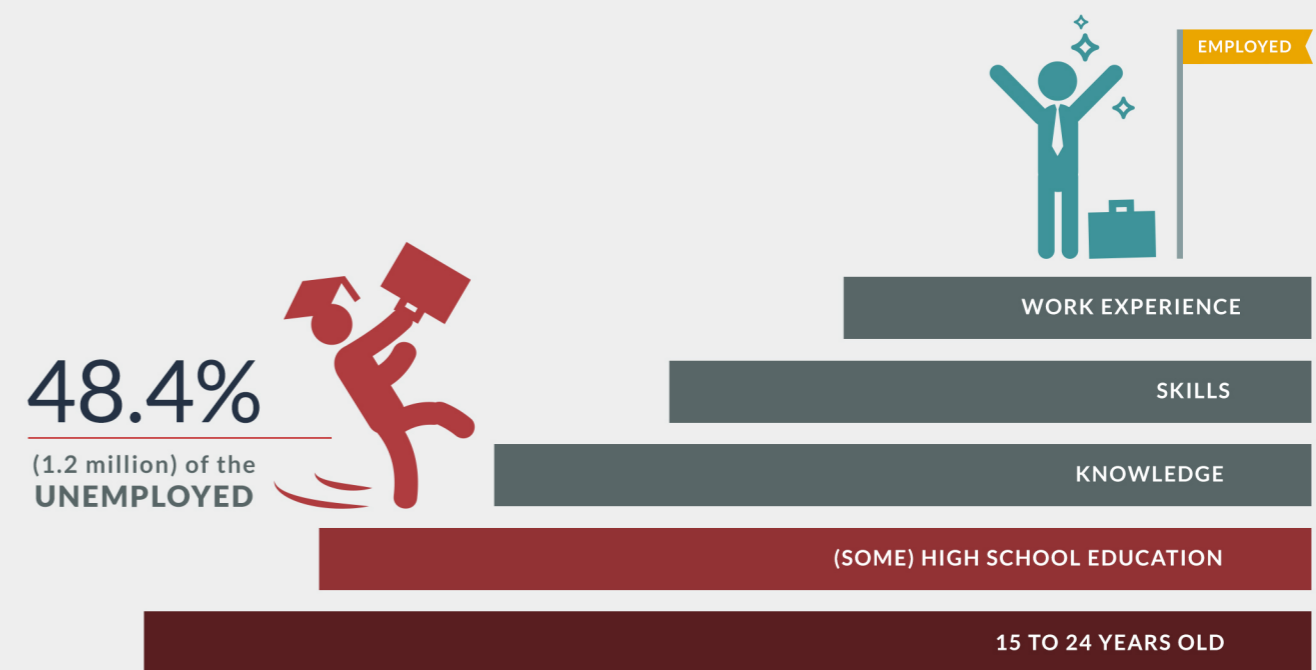
The opening of school year 2017-2018 saw 1.4 million Grade 11 and 12 or Senior High School (SHS) enrollees nationwide pursuing different tracks, such as Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) strand under the Academic track.¹ The same number would also participate in the SHS work immersion program or a simulated workplace experience for the students to develop industry-based competencies to improve their employment prospects.

In Siquijor City, 369 students participated in work immersion activities in tourism establishments. Joelyn Suminguit of Catulayan National High School was one of those students. Through her work immersion in a tourist resort and restaurant in Siquior, Joelyn earned National Certificates in Tourism Promotion and Housekeeping. Upon graduation, her host establishment offered to hire her. She, along with over a million SHS graduates, will benefit from the initiative to align education outcomes with industry needs.

The Coalitions for Change (CfC) program, in partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd), local governments, and industries collaborated closely to improve the SHS work immersion program to benefit both students and industries. This is their reform story.

¹There are four SHS tracks: Academic (STEM, accountancy, business and management, humanities, and social sciences); Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (agri-fishery, home economics, information, communications technology, and industrial arts); Sports; and Arts and Design.

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE



Source: Labor Force Survey 2016, Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

In the Philippines, youth unemployment continues to hamper meaningful economic development. The Labor Force Survey reports that in 2016, about 48.4 percent of the 2.4 million unemployed were between 15 to 24 years old, with some level of high school education.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) often cites job-skills mismatch as one of the reasons behind unemployment. Among the

youth, their lack of knowledge and skills training or work experience puts them at a disadvantage. To improve their employment prospects, it is an advantage for students to develop relevant skills as early as high school.

In 2013, DepEd's K-12 program added two years of SHS to the curriculum. The SHS program also integrated the TVL track to further increase the competitiveness of SHS graduates in the local

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and global employment market. Almost half (49 percent) of public SHS students choose the TVL track. The high number of students choosing this track not only highlighted the relevance of the TVL track for their needs, but also the need to ensure those students have the right set of tech-voc and livelihood skills.

In the early stages of SHS, there was not a great focus on how its graduates could connect to industries' needs for skilled workers. The lack of participation of businesses and industries proved to be a major gap in developing a responsive and appropriate curriculum, including work immersion.

Another stumbling block was the lack of appropriate DepEd and DOLE policies and rules to govern the work immersion program, given the possible risks to both students and employers. Immersion may expose students of minor age to safety and health hazards and businesses could face legal concerns, potential workflow interruption, and productivity loss.

Despite these concerns, the advantages of work immersion were clear for such a significant demand from students choosing the TVL track. Properly implemented, work immersion improves student competencies, helps them make informed career choices, and creates employment opportunities straight out of Senior High. The industries also benefit – huge resources are spent on training newly-hired employees, whereas SHS graduates already have the basic skills before they even apply for a job.

ADDRESSING POLICY GAPS

CfC banked on its established relationships with the DepEd, DOLE, and the private sector to address the policy gaps in the SHS work immersion program particularly to:

- Identify optimal work immersion hours to meet DepEd's learning objectives and fulfill industry requirements, and;
- Ensure SHS students' safety and security while in immersion.

A clear policy was also needed to clarify the roles of government agencies and the private sector.

WORK IMMERSION HOURS

The DepEd initially outlined an 80-hour work immersion model for SHS students. However, industry representatives expressed concerns that 80 hours would be insufficient to adequately prepare SHS for employment.

Given this important feedback, the CfC team engaged Dina Ocampo, then DepEd Undersecretary for Programs and Projects. Her office led the Task Force in-charge of the K-12 program and was working on possible models of increased immersion duration, from a minimum of 80 to a maximum of 320 hours. Local school divisions would be able to choose the appropriate model to maximize the students' learning experience in local industries.

SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

With inputs from CfC industry partners in the tourism and semi-conductor industry, DepEd identified “safe learning areas” where SHS students could work or observe actual work situations. Industry partners also helped plan the appropriate timing for student immersion and determine the required supervision.

The concept of safe learning areas was first modeled in a semi-conductor company in Calamba City, Laguna. DOLE regulations initially identified the semi-conductor industry workplace as hazardous, therefore, students of minor age could not be considered for immersion. In acknowledgement of the learning opportunity for students, the DepEd Division of Calamba and the company agreed to identify areas where students could observe and simulate work activities. This simple accommodation minimized unnecessary exposure of students to hazards.

On June 5, 2017, DepEd released its Department Order no. 30, s. 2017 “Guidelines for Work Immersion”. The DO clearly reflects CfC and the industry partners' recommendations on the SHS delivery models and the requirements of schools and industries to provide detailed tasks for the students undergoing the work immersion program.

A month later, DOLE issued Labor Advisory no. 9, s. 2017 “Guidance to Host Establishments in Ensuring Safe Workplaces for Senior High

School Students under Work Immersion Program". This policy addressed the concerns of companies on accepting students of minor age and outlined how companies should deal with students in the workplace environment. This included the identification of appropriate hours of reporting (nothing beyond 10:00 in the evening or earlier than 6:00 in the morning) and the provision of protective equipment and devices in accordance with occupational safety and health standards. The policy was a product of CfC's work with DOLE Undersecretary Nicon Fameronag, then DOLE Undersecretary and the Bureaus of Local Employment and Labor Relations.

CURRICULUM

One of the main limitations of the DepEd SHS curriculum was that it did not adequately respond to industry needs. A two-fold approach was used to improve the content of the program.

First, CfC worked with groups from two sectors with the potential for long-term, sustainable employment opportunities for the youth: manufacturing in Calamba, through the ICCP Group Foundation Inc. (IGFI) and tourism in Bohol, through Bohol Association of Hotels, Resorts, and Restaurants (BAHRR). These groups were surveyed on the required skills and competencies, which were then compared to the SHS learning outcomes. Based on the results, CfC helped facilitate activities to develop contextualized instructional plans and learning materials to address industry needs.

Second, CfC lobbied DepEd to enhance the curriculum and learning materials based on the local industry context. CfC invited DepEd's Bureau of Curriculum Development (BCD) to attend the series of workshops and summits organized by BAHRR and IGFI to serve as government resource persons and learn from the experiences of SHS implementing partners. The exchange of information was sustained with the DepEd also inviting CfC and industry partners to the national industry summits and follow through immersion policy consultations. Throughout this exchange, CfC closely coordinated and provided technical support to the BCD.

RESULTS

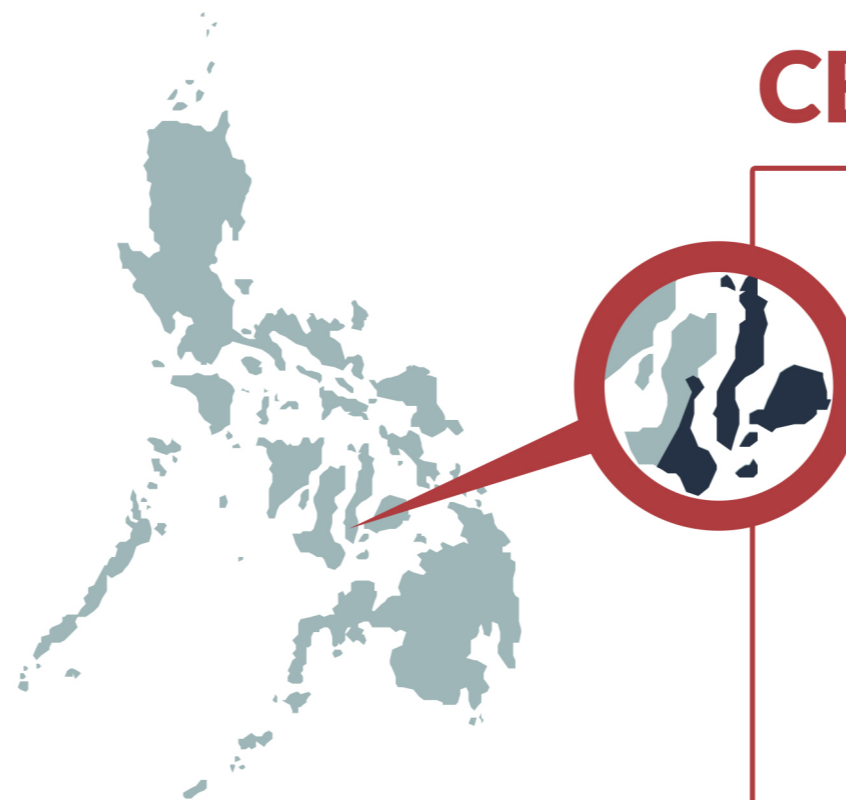
ENHANCED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Learning from the local businesses they have partnered with, the DepEd Regional Office VII (Central Visayas) continues to foster the growth and replication of the tourism-focused TVL track. A DepEd Regional policy on TVL quality is also underway. The policy institutionalizes the industry-based curriculum offerings and facilities and provides guidance on the assessment and certification of SHS students. The said regional policy shall feed into the BCD's TVL roadmap and help shape the industry-based TVL curriculum for SHS nationwide.

The industry linkage programs resulted in over 212,000 Grades 11 and 12 students successfully completing work immersion in Central Visayas.² In Bohol province, 98 percent (187,704) passed the National Certification (NC) on their tourism-related specializations. The immersion experience is seen as a defining factor in the high passing rate. The NC, administered by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), is awarded to those who have "satisfactorily demonstrated competence" and this certification is recognized by employers nationwide.

Initial reports from the Region are promising: about 60 percent of SHS graduates are now employed. Those with plans to proceed to higher education also now have the advantage armed with the knowledge and experience from their work-immersion.

There are also indications that the safety guidelines developed have been effective, with no reported violations or incidents of child exploitation in the work-immersion sites.



CENTRAL VISAYAS



212,000

GRADES 11 AND 12 STUDENTS COMPLETED WORK IMMERSION



98 %

IN BOHOL: 187,704 NATIONAL CERTIFICATION (NC) PASSERS



60 %

IN THE REGION: 127,200 NOW EMPLOYED

² Excluding the province of Negros Oriental, which was part of a different region at that time

INDUSTRY INVESTING IN THE PROGRAM

CfC's efforts also led to the formation of effective partnerships to support SHS implementation.

Calamba City established its own Employment and Human Resources Development Council, composed of national government agency representatives, including DepEd, DOLE, Public Employment Service Office (PESO), and industry partners. Through the Council, the City Government invested in a Fabrication Laboratory where students in STEM and TVL specializations can apply their new skills in semi-conductor and light manufacturing. Industry partners provided the laboratory equipment.

In Bohol, the Provincial Government, the Municipal Government of Panglao, other national government agencies, and tourism industry partnered to establish a Tourism Learning Facility in Lourdes National High School. Designed to simulate a hotel, complete with a model front office, guest rooms, kitchen, and restaurant, the facility enables the students to practice their skills on hotel management, cookery, baking, electrical maintenance, and carpentry.³ Noel Barrameda, General Manager of a resort in Bohol speaks of the work immersion advantage for employers, "Our doors are open to (SHS) student trainees, as it also provides us an opportunity to discover talents. We want the graduates to be ready for the industry, to have good communication skills, and basically just already know what to do when they get on the job."

Other divisions in Region VII, like Lapu-Lapu City in Cebu, have adopted Bohol's approach with a Tourism Learning Facility also in sight.

³More on Bohol, Laguna, and Central Visayas' experience on implementing the SHS work immersion here: <https://asiafoundation.org/video/philippines-linking-senior-high-schools-and-industry/>





LESSONS LEARNED

The three-year reform effort in SHS yielded the following lessons:

1. THE INDUSTRY AS AN AGENT OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Beyond serving as hosts for work immersion programs, the local industry's specialized knowledge is critical to designing curricula and learning materials that will help SHS graduates compete in high-growth, high-value, and high-employment sectors.

2. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY TO COORDINATE

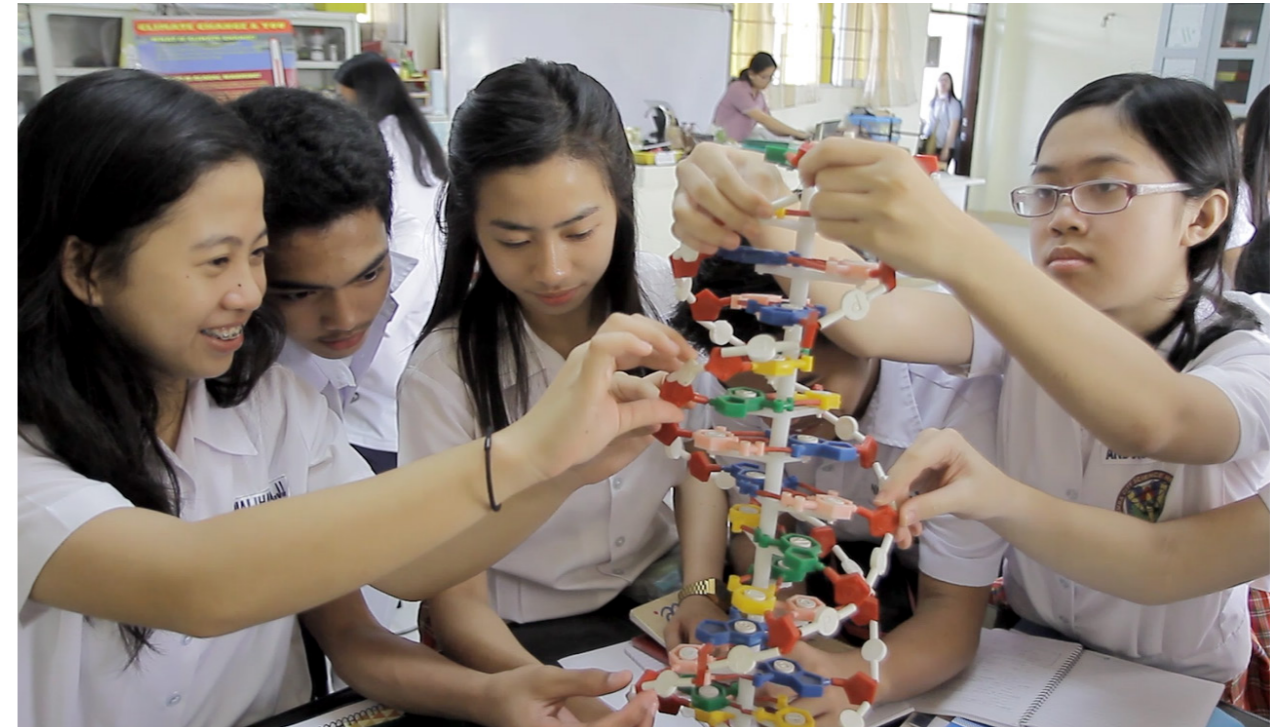
CfC's enjoyment of DepEd's BCD to attend the activities of industry partners helped DepEd recognize the need for a curriculum that would respond to local government and industry priorities. At the local level, CfC helped link DepEd divisions with local industry partners who could provide input on in-demand skills and training content, as well as identify companies willing to provide immersion opportunities to SHS students.

The task of contextualization is a challenge for a centralized agency like DepEd. Hence, although the Curriculum Contextualization Policy has already been drafted and validated, it has not been finalized at the time of writing.

3. STRONG LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRITICAL TO MOVING NATIONAL POLICY

DepEd divisions and local governments are the primary stakeholders in educational policy reform. Their input and validation at every step were key factors in the reform's success. The initial gains of the DepEd, local government, and industry partnerships in Bohol and Calamba City were good leverage for replication and built the demand for DOLE and DepEd to develop implementing rules.

CONCLUSION



CfC believes that with Bohol and Laguna's experience in work immersion, the SHS policy initiatives clear the way for the national and local governments and industries to coordinate and learn from each other better. The partnerships that CfC brokered made it possible to improve the content and implementation of the SHS work immersion program.

In time, with the DepEd's intent to scale these relevant SHS training and work experience programs aligned with industry expectations, the SHS program shall help reduce youth unemployment, contribute to the pool of skilled labor for businesses to thrive, and boost economic development.



For More Information

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