



## hooksonian Democratic Pedagogy for a Democratic Country: A Critique of the Current K-12 Program

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### Abstract

Aimed at improving the quality of Philippine education, the K-12 Program merits laudation. Unsurprisingly, it had been subjected to various critiques. For example, several works have pointed out that it is heavily influenced by and oriented towards neoliberalism. Adding to these, we also offer a critique of the K-12 Program and intend to contribute to the body of voices calling for its positive reform. Unlike them, however, instead of pointing to its neoliberal influence and orientation, we argue that the current K-12 Program makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to practice progressive pedagogies the likes of which are espoused by bell hooks. In effect, it does not serve to better actualize democracy in the Philippines through forming and empowering democratic Filipinos. This contention arises from the program's systemic enforcement of the 'racing against time' mode of education through the congested learning expectations as contained in the nationwide-issued Curriculum Guides (CGs). The outline of the discussion is as follows: first, we discuss what hooksonian democratic pedagogy/education is; second, we investigate the experiences of teachers as they try to teach the K-12 Program's congested curriculum; third, we then problematize the program, focusing on its congested curriculum, using the framework of hooksonian democratic pedagogy.

**Keywords:** K-12 Program, congested curriculum, hooksonian democratic pedagogy, empowering and emancipative education, classroom democratic spaces

## Introduction

Although Pres. Aquino III only signed Republic Act 10533 (hereafter referred to as K-12 Program) on May 15, 2013, into law, the Philippines had already implemented it for the SY 2012-2013. As per RA 10533, this reform was meant to “develop productive and responsible citizens equipped with the essential competencies, skills, and values for both life-long learning and employment”<sup>1</sup> notably through improving the education system (especially the basic education sector) to be globally competitive and at par with international standards (before this reform, the country was one of the last three remaining countries in the world – Angola and Djibouti being the other two – to have a 10-year basic education) as well as gear the goals of high school education towards preparing students for employment, entrepreneurship, skills development, or higher education. The Department of Education further adds that “A 13-year program is found to be the best period for learning under basic education.”<sup>2</sup> Under the K-12 Program, students are mandated to undergo 1 year in kindergarten, 6 years of primary education, 4 years of junior high school, and 2 years of senior high school. To date, the K-12 Program may be the most comprehensive educational reform in the country, affecting changes not only in the basic education sector but also in the higher education sector (e.g., prompting curricular reforms).<sup>3</sup>

Being a reform that has a comprehensive effect on the whole education system, the said program has been subjected to scrutiny.

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<sup>1</sup> “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013,” Rep. Act No. 10533, (May 15, 2013) (Phil.), <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2013/05/15/republic-act-no-10533/>.

<sup>2</sup> “What is K to 12 Program?” *Official Gazette*, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/k-12>.

<sup>3</sup> Commission on Higher Education, “General Education Curriculum: Holistic Understandings Intellectual and Civic Competencies (CMO No. 20, s. 2013),” <https://ched.gov.ph>2013/20>.

Notably, several works have argued, or at least touched upon it, that it is heavily influenced by and oriented towards neoliberalism. For example, Calderon argues that it is aimed at creating cheaper and more exploitable labor.<sup>4</sup> Pasco argues that it has virtually transformed education into a factory to yield human resources for employers.<sup>5</sup> Cariño argues that “K-12 may be seen as a continuation of a long-existing trend which demotes university education from its status as an all-important goal into a pliant, malleable means towards the achievement of purposes designed and dictated by business organizations and corporate interests.”<sup>6</sup> Marquez argues that it reflects “the obvious preference of the government to reduce education to a mere tool to secure employment for our prospective graduates.”<sup>7</sup> Moratilla argues that, aside from being influenced by colonialism, “the introduction of K-12 was based on the profit-oriented logic of the neoliberal market that sees the educational system as a sure and unending source of labor.”<sup>8</sup>

Like them, we also offer a critique of the K-12 program intending to contribute to the body of voices calling for its positive reform. Unlike them, however, instead of pointing to its neoliberal influence and orientation, we argue for the thesis that it makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to practice progressive pedagogies (although, in this essay, we will only be limited to the model espoused by bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins) that enriches education to become inclusive, empowering, liberatory (emancipatory), and democratic. In effect, the program does not serve to better actualize democracy in the Philippines through forming and empowering democratic Filipinos.

Moreover, in our treatment of the K-12 Program, we will only focus on the high school level both as the main reference and the target of our critique. As the main reference, we mainly focus on the experiences of teachers as they implement the curriculum at the high school level, particularly in their struggle to cover the learning

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Teresa Calderon, “A Critique of K-12 Philippine Education System,” *International Journal of Education and Research* 2, no. 10 (2014): 546.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Oliver Pasco, “Heidegger and K-to-12,” *Suri* 4, no. 1 (2015): 42-45.

<sup>6</sup> Jovito Cariño, “Philosophy and the Academe,” *Suri* 3, no. 1-2 (2014): 27.

<sup>7</sup> Leander Marquez, “Philosophy in basic education: Towards the strengthening of the foundations of Philippine education,” *Sage Publications* 0, no. 0 (2017): 13.

<sup>8</sup> Noel Christian A. Moratilla, “Revisiting Paulo: Critical Pedagogy and Testimonial Narratives as Liberative Spaces in the Philippines’ K-12 Curriculum,” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 17, no. 2: 250.

expectations it 'prescribes'. As the main target, we intend our critique to affect a positive revision of the program, at least at the high school level, especially on lessening learning expectations for classes to be conducive to democratic spaces. While ensuring more time through the decongestion of the learning expectations will not ensure the creation of democratic spaces and practices, it goes a long way toward making our classrooms more conducive for such.

Worth pointing out at this point is that while it is true that much of bell hooks' work is drawn from her experiences and reflections as a professor in academia (higher education), and that she largely addresses these concerns towards professors and students in the same, nothing prevents us from appropriating her work to the high school level. She attests to the fact that the education of students towards addressing various pathologies in society may begin already at the elementary level. Recounting her experiences as an elementary pupil at Booker T. Washington, she writes,

They [her teachers] were committed to nurturing intellect so that we could become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers—black folks who used our 'minds.' We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization. Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anti-colonial. [...] Teachers worked with and for us to ensure that we would fulfill our intellectual destiny and by so doing uplift the race. My teachers were on a mission.<sup>9</sup>

The outline of this essay will be as follows: first, we briefly discuss what hooksian democratic pedagogy/education is; second, we look into the experiences of teachers as they try to teach the K-12 program's congested curriculum; third, we then problematize the program, focusing on its congested curriculum, using the framework

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<sup>9</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

of hooksian democratic pedagogy; and, the last part will be the conclusion.

## **Methodology**

In exploring and elaborating on the issue of the K-12 Program's congested curriculum, archival research was employed. From this, we established our contention that the Program, intentionally or unintentionally, systemically enforces that teachers and students should 'race against time.' Moreover, in problematizing the K-12 Program, building from our previous contention, descriptive and critical analyses from the vantage point of hooksian democratic pedagogy were employed. The hooksian analysis rendered us the following inferential results: the pedagogical practices engendered by 'racing against time' promote blind obedience, passivity, and conformity of the students rather than the development of their critical thinking, democratic consciousness, and agency; there are certain mechanisms that, even though not intended to be so but in effect, serve to promote the aforementioned banking method practices as well as discourage the practice of hooksian democratic pedagogy; and lastly, the seemingly insignificant issue of 'lack of time' in the educational process serves as a very huge obstacle in the practicability of hooksian democratic pedagogy in our classrooms, or other paradigms and practices reflective of progressive pedagogies.

## **hooksian Democratic Education**

Generally, bell hooks maintains that education has an important role in the socio-political sphere. She considers it one of the rare locations where we can hope to influence the young to positively affect our socio-political situation.<sup>10</sup> More particularly, it is where we hope to make them aware of the various structures and cultures of domination and oppression, help them develop democratic consciousness, and make them confront the possibility that they themselves may have been unknowingly conditioned by their surroundings (e.g. by the media) to be comfortable, or even perpetrators of domination and oppression. Of course, hand in hand,

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<sup>10</sup> bell hooks and David Trend, "Representation and Democracy: An Interview," in *Radical Democracy*, ed. David Trend (New York: Routledge, 1996), 235-36.

this is to inspire them to unlearn at least some of these biases and prejudices and eventually inspire them to join the cause or various 'socio-political movements' that aim to make our world a better place for everyone. Lanier further explains that "The process of becoming educated, for the dissenting hooks, is about learning to develop the tools and frameworks to interrogate all forms of domination and colonization, of freeing the student from the classrooms and systems of thought which have taught the pupil to obey and be passive."<sup>11</sup> While this may be considered a 'small revolution,' hooks considers the power of teachers to engender such activism as very threatening to those who hold the reins of power.

However, she is not referring to just any kind of education. In her philosophy of education, mainly expressed in a trilogy of compiled essays (*Teaching to Transgress* (1994), *Teaching Community* (2003), *Teaching Critical Thinking* (2010)), she observes that some traditional models of education largely serve to perpetuate oppression, domination, or unjust discrimination both in and out of the classroom. In a sense, they serve to condition the young to be comfortable with the aforementioned by enforcing the idea that they are to primarily learn blind obedience, passivity, and conformity rather than develop critical thinking, democratic consciousness, and agency. At the same time, the teachers who follow these models are those who oppose progressive models such as those espoused by bell hooks. As she writes, "Education as the practice of freedom was continually undermined by professors who were actively hostile to the notion of student participation."<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, she maintains, "Authoritarian practices, promoted and encouraged by many institutions, undermines democratic education in the classroom. [...] authoritarianism in the classroom dehumanizes and thus shuts down the "magic" that is always present when individuals are active learners. It takes the "fun out of study" and makes it repressive and oppressive."<sup>13</sup> To put it more illustratively, democratic education is undermined whenever teachers regard themselves as 'dictators' whose voice and presence are the only things that matter, the

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<sup>11</sup> Kirsten Lanier, "The Teaching Philosophy of bell hooks: The Classroom as a Site for Passionate Interrogation" (Paper presentation, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

classroom as their ‘mini-kingdom’, and the students as their passive, unquestioning, and obedient subjects (or objects) who are only expected to memorize information for the sake of exams and should only respond when they are called on.<sup>14</sup>

As such, she advances a model that manifests ‘education as the practice of freedom’ which she calls by many names - engaged/transformatory/liberatory/radical/democratic pedagogy. This model aims to empower both teachers and (especially) students to ‘transgress’ oppressive, dominating, or unjustly discriminating structures and cultures both in and out of the classroom, “because the heart of this approach to learning is critical thinking.”<sup>15</sup> Florendo elaborates that hooks’s philosophy of education is *trialectic*. “First, it involves education as resistance, a transgression against current restrictive structures. Second, it includes an engaged pedagogy where classrooms serve as spaces where teachers and learners are mutually involved in their respective self-realization and actualization. And third, it involves learning experienced as a joyful and ecstatic transformation.”<sup>16</sup> However, for this essay, we shall not have a detailed exposition of hooks’s philosophy of education but will only focus on one of the fundamental principles that she advocates: valuing students’ voices, or generally, student participation.

hooks insists that in the classroom, it is not only the teacher’s voice that matters and is valuable, but those of the students, too. As such, an indispensable challenge to a democratic pedagogue is to create spaces for, and a climate of, free expression or democratic exchange of ideas wherein the students are empowered to think critically and voice out – share, question, dissent, critique, and dialogue. As Yancy puts it, “hooks wants to encourage a dialogical space where students can see themselves as ‘speaking subject[s] worthy of voice.’ As speaking subjects worthy of voice, it is not enough that students name their personal experiences. Rather, they must also cross-examine the experiences of others (students/teachers/professors) and respond in critically engaged ways ‘to the knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Florendo, “A hooksian Critique of Spady’s Outcomes-Based Framework as Applied in the Philippines” (PhD diss., De La Salle University, 2020), 100.

presented.”<sup>17</sup> Moreover, hooks also reiterates that this “cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices,”<sup>18</sup> to which she provides ample examples, often sharing her own pedagogical practices. For example, activities are as simple as writing short academic reflections and/or personal journals and then reading them or parts of those to one another.

For hooks, “To hear each other (the sound of different voices), to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition. It also ensures that no student remains invisible in the classroom. [...] Even if there is a student present whose voice cannot be heard in spoken words, by “signing” (even if we cannot read the signs), they make their presence felt.”<sup>19</sup> Other examples include encouraging the students to share personal experiences (confessional narratives) related to the lesson; and creating opportunities for them to raise criticisms, feedback, or interventions to improve the teachers’ pedagogical practices (and this should not just come at the end of the semester or school year as is usually the case because then it would be too late for improvement); not being too rigid about the set agenda (lesson plan) for the day to accommodate digressive discussions or concerns of the students; or even having meals with them, as a class or individually, to elicit discussions beyond the classroom.<sup>20</sup>

Pedagogical practices that ensure student participation are, of course, not without challenges, as hooks also experienced. For example, there may be times when students abuse “that freedom in the classroom by only wanting to dwell on personal experience.” When the class discussion may get “bogged down with people who just like to hear themselves talk,” or when politics of domination in class discussions arise (e.g. when those students who are outspoken and confident or those who possess ‘authority of experience’ directly or indirectly serve to silence the rest of the class).<sup>21</sup> As such, she cautions teachers to be keen to such instances and be prepared to respectfully interrupt and intervene to maintain a democratic climate of class discussions.

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<sup>17</sup> George Yancy, “Engaging Whiteness and the Practice of Freedom: The Creation of Subversive Academic Spaces,” in *Critical Perspectives on bell hooks*, eds. Maria del Guadalupe Davidson and George Yancy (New York: Routledge, 2009), 40.

<sup>18</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 89; 205-06; 155; 204.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15; 151; 39; 84.

Responding to some critiques, hooks clarifies that this democratic space is not purposeless and directionless, wherein “anything can be said, no matter how irrelevant to classroom subject matter.”<sup>22</sup> Or that this space is just for “stereotypical rap session: everyone says anything they want; there’s no real direction or purpose to the class other than making each other feel good; that anything can be said.”<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, this space is opened under the assumption that everyone in the classroom, teacher and students alike, will act responsibly.<sup>24</sup> On the part of the students, what they voice out, even if they are digressive, unpopular, or go against the grain, will contribute to the learning process; on the part of the teachers, the space should be orchestrated to serve the learning process; and, on the parts of both, that they should (critically) listen and value what each other says. Of course, not all students welcome this idea of having to “make a verbal contribution, and so I [bell hooks] have had to make it clear from the outset that this is a requirement in my classes.”<sup>25</sup> Related here is also responsibly understanding the place of the teacher. In such democratic spaces, the teacher and students indeed become, in a sense, equal. However, “This is not to suggest that the students and the teacher are equal and have as much power, but that all are equal to the extent that all are equally committed to creating a learning context [...]”<sup>26</sup>

Now, the seemingly insignificant practice of insisting on students’ participation in the learning process, for one, manifests education as democratic or as a practice of freedom. Speaking of how Freire inspired her to find applications of ‘conscientization’ in the classroom, hooks shares, “Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classrooms with the conviction that I and every other student needed to be an active participant, not a passive consumer.”<sup>27</sup> Surely, student participation through the many ways she suggested would enhance the learning environment of the students. However, the effects of such practices are not only aimed at

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>25</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Maria-Liisa Järvelä, “Engaged Pedagogy: An Introduction to bell hooks’ Educational Philosophy,” in *Ethical Challenges for Teacher Education and Teaching*, eds. Vappu Sunnari and Rauni Räsänen (Oulu: Oulu University Press, 2000), 154.

<sup>27</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 14.

being confined within the classroom but, more importantly, beyond it (the socio-political sphere) as aforementioned. For hooks, “Coming to voice is not just the act of telling one’s experience [or thoughts]. It is using that telling strategically—to come to voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, coming to voice is more than just making the class interesting; it has a political importance. Just as students are empowered to become critical thinkers and speak freely in the classroom, they are also empowered to become critical thinkers and speak freely about other matters, especially those that perpetuate oppression, domination, or unjust discrimination both in and out of the classroom. They are empowered to transgress the boundaries set up to perpetuate the aforementioned. In this light, we then understand why hooks states, “My commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism.”<sup>29</sup> Lanier’s words are also enlightening on this matter:

hooks’ engaged pedagogy and rejection of coercive hierarchies is not simply about the transformation of individual classrooms in higher education [or education in general] [...] Because all that supports systems of dominance, paradigms of racism and classism, and misogyny [sic] are life-sapping and debilitating, a primary means of identifying addressing these debilitations and silencing is through interrogative dialog. This interrogative dialog should be taught in the classroom. For Hooks, classroom practice is about the reinvention of the world through learning. [...] For hooks, education for liberation [...] foments voice and critical awareness in students. It enables students to begin to question the prevailing paradigms of race, class, and patriarchy found abundantly in schools (and everywhere) and gives students confidence in their authority to engage in such questioning.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, hooks’ insistence on students’ participation (or generally on democratic pedagogical practices) is an indispensable

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>30</sup> Kirsten Lanier, “The Teaching Philosophy of bell hooks,” 5-8.

component in the reform of educational systems to be more inclusive, empowering, liberatory (emancipatory), and democratic. This needs to be emphasized because it may be the case that changes (or calls for such changes) geared towards the aforementioned reform may just be limited to the curricular component only. To be clear, hooks sees the importance of progressive curricular changes, for example, the inclusion or representation of the traditionally marginalized works and ideas of women in the curriculum. However, she also cautions us that the mere inclusion or representation in the curriculum or syllabus, although commendable, does not automatically make classroom experience (or education in general) subversive and constructive in the effort of addressing oppression, domination, or unjust discrimination in education. For one, this may just be a superficial change. As Ron Scapp, in dialogue with bell hooks, states: "In philosophy classes today, work on race, ethnicity, and gender is used, but not in a subversive way. *It is simply used to update the curriculum superficially.*"<sup>31</sup>

In the same vein, hooks adds that it may also just be a manifestation of tokenism. Speaking of her experience with a colleague in Oberlin College towards "changing curriculum and teaching practices in ways that were progressive and promoting of inclusion," she writes, "All too often we found a will to include those considered "marginal" *without a willingness to accord their work the same respect and consideration given other work.* In Women's Studies, for example, individuals will often focus on women of color at the very end of the semester or lump everything about race and difference together in one section."<sup>32</sup> Such practices do not interrogate the biases of conventional canons and are just another form of tokenism. Moreover, even 'liberal' teachers who include radical materials may still be suspected of perpetuating marginalization or domination towards their students under their practices and conduct inside the classroom. In a dialogue with Ron Scapp, hooks emphasizes, "Again and again, you and I are saying that different, more radical subject matter does not create a liberatory [emancipatory] pedagogy, that a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 142. (emphasis added)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. (emphasis added)

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Her criticality also extends to teachers who claim to apply progressive ideas in their pedagogies. For example, hooks shares her encounters with “white male professors who claimed to follow Freire’s model even as their pedagogical practices were mired in structures of domination, mirroring the styles of conservative professors even as they approached subjects from a more progressive standpoint.”<sup>34</sup> In short, working towards an education that is truly inclusive, democratic, and liberatory (emancipatory) does not only consist of progressively changing *what* should be taught but should also include progressively changing *how* one should teach. As hooks astutely states, “Education as the practice of freedom is not just about liberatory knowledge, it’s about a liberatory practice in the classroom.”<sup>35</sup>

The emphasis on a more democratic, empowering, and liberatory (emancipatory) pedagogy is not meant to devalue the importance of progressive curricular changes. Rather, it is meant to complement it. Indeed, how can we confidently call for inclusivity, liberation, and empowerment for our students if our classroom pedagogies and conduct are not reflective of such? Just as we work, then, towards the long-due recognition and inclusion of marginalized and suppressed voices of women philosophers in the curricula, for example, we should also work towards the recognition, inclusion, and empowerment of the many marginalized and suppressed students, especially to come to voice in our classrooms. Through this, we can hope that we are indeed helping students become truly democratic, inclusive, and empowered, both in and out of the classroom. Through this, we can understand hooks’s confidence in the power of education in making our world a better place for everyone.

### **The K-12 Program’s Congested Curriculum: Teachers as ‘Racing Against Time’**

Aside from the qualitative evaluation of the K-12 Program, there were also empirical studies about the practical challenges that arose during the initial years of its implementation. Interestingly, even though these studies differed in their variables (participants, locality, etc.), most of their findings were similar. More particularly, recurring concerns included the congestion of the curriculum, additional extra-

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 17-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 147.

curricular obligations given to teachers, insufficient or poor school amenities (including media and information technologies), insufficient or inadequate learning and teaching materials, and a lack of teaching skills (responsive to the K-12 Program).<sup>36</sup> Among the concerns mentioned, however, we only focus on the issue of a congested curriculum because it is something that arises internally, as it were, from the Program itself through its nationwide-issued Curriculum Guides (CGs). In addition, we regard the study of Robertson et al.<sup>37</sup> to be a reliable representative of the studies that touch upon this issue due to its very comprehensive scope. More particularly, the researchers surveyed and conducted focused-group discussions with approximately 2000 classroom teachers (of elementary, junior high, and senior high schools teaching various subjects) from selected schools in the National Capital Region, Regions I, VII, and XI to inform their review of the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines from 2019 to 2020. One of the matters that they investigated was the teachers' perspectives and experiences as they taught the subject/s they handled following the said CGs.

When asked, through a survey, if they had enough time to teach the learning competencies (expectations) allocated to a given quarter, "few teachers reported having adequate time to teach all learning competencies."<sup>38</sup> When the researchers also surveyed the time allotted by the teachers to specific or individual learning competencies, they found that "Although the situation varies by grade and subject, the results reveal that there is not a single learning competency that all

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<sup>36</sup> See Leonardo Flora Combalicer, Jr., "Best Practices and Problems in the Initial Implementation of the K+12 Curriculum Among Teachers in Infanta, Quezon: Implications to an Effective Implementation of Senior High School," *Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 4 (2016): 9-13; Remedios Bacus and Rivica Alda, "Senior high school teaching: A phenomenological inquiry," *Malaysian Journal of Learning & Instruction* 19, no. 1 (2002): 256-271; Fernan Abragan, Vangie Abarcas, Ivy Mae Aquino, and Rowena Bagongon, "Research Review on K-12 Curriculum Implementation in The Philippines: A Generic Perspective," *European Journal of Educational and Social Sciences* 7, no. 1 (2022): 6-7; Krizia Magallanes, Jae Young Chung, and Sunbok Lee, "The Philippine Teachers Concerns on Educational Reform Using Concern Based Adoption Model," *Frontiers in Education* 7 (2022): 7-8.

<sup>37</sup> Pam Robertson, Louie Cagasan, Thida Kheang, Lalaine Bagui, Julie Dela Cruz, Field Rickards, Marlene Ferido, and Therese Bustos, *Review of the Implemented Curriculum* (Quezon City: Assessment Curriculum and Technology Research Centre, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

teachers surveyed had adequate time to teach. [...] This analysis adds more evidence to the claim that there is inadequate time to teach all learning competencies allocated to each quarter.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in another survey aimed at identifying various factors affecting their implementation of the curriculum, one of the top five factors considered as ‘great hindrances’ is the ‘number of learning competencies in the curriculum.’ And, perhaps for good measure, the researchers also probed whether the issue of not having sufficient time for all the learning competencies was affected by the competence and proficiency of the teachers or not. By comparing the responses of master’s degree holders and non-master’s degree holders, the result was just the same. They write: “Assuming master teachers are selected because they are the most highly skilled teachers, the similarity in implementation between these two groups indicates that teacher proficiency is not a major influence on difficulties covering the intended curriculum.”<sup>40</sup> The personal sharing of some teachers further strengthens the points being made. One senior high school teacher shared:

I usually can’t tackle it [referring to a lesson] because there are too many learning competencies. We have already raised this concern, and we found out that we have similar experiences. [...] It’s [the curriculum] very congested, just too much... We cannot do anything but follow that one. Consequently, quality is being compromised.<sup>41</sup>

A similar comment was made by a junior high school teacher:

Perhaps one of the disadvantages is that there are so many things that need to be discussed. But you must finish everything for a certain number of days. Sometimes, I find it already too much for the students to learn [...].<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>40</sup> Robertson et al., *Review of the Implemented Curriculum*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

As the teachers painstakingly delivered a congested curriculum on time (or within the allotted timeframe), many of them have admitted to employing that which was so often criticized as a pedagogical method: spoon-feeding. And even then, some of them still admit that employing it does not guarantee that the job gets done. As a result, they had to personally select the learning competencies that they deemed essential, *particularly for the students' examinations*. Moreover, "When teachers were not able to finish all learning competencies as expected, they gave it to students as homework, hoping that they would do it, but teachers admitted that they sometimes were not able to check if the students completed their homework or learned what was expected."<sup>43</sup> This (lamentable) picture of the kind of practice teachers resort to, they described "as 'racing against time' with minimal or no expectation of real learning."<sup>44</sup> This, the researchers contend, compromises the quality of learning of the students which may result in their lacking of foundational skills and knowledge expected for their subjects in the succeeding grade level (due to the spiral progression design), or, in the case of Senior High School students, for employment, entrepreneurship, or tertiary education.

All these strongly suggest that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to cover all the learning competencies expected of them as stated in their respective subjects' CG. Now, while the researchers argue that "improvements [to the K-12 curriculum] will require more than simply reducing the number of learning competencies in the curriculum,"<sup>45</sup> they nonetheless reiterate their earlier recommendation: "The number of learning competencies should be considered in the light of future results from the review of the implemented and attained curriculum to ensure all learning competencies can be taught to the required cognitive depth in the time available in schools."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>46</sup> Pam Robertson, Therese Bustos, Field Rickards, Marlene Ferido, Lalaine Bagui, Julie Dela Cruz, and Thida Kheang, *Review of the Intended Curriculum* (Quezon City: Assessment Curriculum and Technology Research Centre, 2020), 7.

## Discussions

We are now in the position to pull the strings that have been running along with the preceding discussions. Foremost, based on the previous section, we can say that the K-12 Program, intentionally or unintentionally, systemically ensured that teachers and students should 'race against time' through its nationwide-issued CGs. The fact that the teachers and students always lack time to discuss lessons sufficiently is something that is systemically put into effect. As we have seen, this has engendered practices that are detrimental to a truly educational process, such as the spoon-feeding method of teaching, placing examinations as the prime standard on what to teach, and rushing through the lessons to cover as many learning expectations as possible. For sure, there is more to be added to the list. One of those that we argue now to be included is that the Program makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for the teachers and students to experience 'education as the practice of freedom.' As such, it does not reflect education that is empowering to both teachers and (especially) students to 'transgress' oppressive, dominating, or unjustly discriminating structures and cultures both in and out of the classroom. How does this come to pass?

Foremost, the practices of spoon-feeding, putting examinations as the prime standard, and rushing through the lessons have already been criticized by bell hooks as hindering democratic pedagogical practices. These are all reflective of the banking model of education that boils education down to memorization of information and then regurgitating it for examinations. Not to mention that the practices of spoon-feeding and rushing through the lessons also convey the image of passive and unquestioning students, since anything else would constitute delay. All these serve to promote blind obedience, passivity, and conformity in students rather than the development of their critical thinking, democratic consciousness, and agency.

We are not putting the blame, however, on the teachers. We recognize that they have done these out of necessity as they were 'racing against time.' Yet this prompts us to look deeper into this matter just as hooks looked and pointed out the many biases, values, and practices that reinforce structures of domination and oppression in education. In this light, we then argue that there are mechanisms in place that, although not intended to be so, subtly yet firmly force the

teachers and students to 'race against time'. One of these is the 'spiral progression' design of the Program. The gradual and interconnected teaching of concepts per grade level is not bad. However, as has already been repeatedly pointed out, there are just too many learning expectations to be covered. Despite this, they cannot help but try to do so because if they fail to 'teach' what is 'prescribed', they bear the liability of not equipping their students with the knowledge and skills pre-requisite for their subjects in their next grade level, tertiary education, entrepreneurship, or employment. Furthermore, performing well in various standardized assessments such as the National Achievement Test and Programme for International Student Assessment compounds their motivation to race against time. Not to mention the direct or indirect ostracization, belittlement, stigma, or reprimand the teachers may receive from their peers or superiors if they do not cover enough learning expectations. With such mechanisms in place, the term 'prescribed' becomes apparent that it is not an accurate term to describe how teachers should regard the learning expectations contained in the CGs. Ultimately, these mechanisms serve to promote the aforementioned banking method practices as well as discourage the practice of hooksian democratic pedagogy.

Furthermore, suppose we are to encourage the teachers who participated in the aforementioned research to be the kind of pedagogues hooks speaks about, we would surely be met with disbelief. This is because the kind of pedagogy espoused by bell hooks, aside from requiring a progressive mindset, skills, and lots of energy, also requires time. Time is needed for opening spaces wherein students can take time to critically think and come to voice, for orchestrating a democratic exchange of ideas, and digressive discussions, changing the set agenda for the day to accommodate the students' situation or concerns, and, at least, letting the students read a section of their academic reflections or personal journals to the class or one another, etc. Yet, as we have established, the lack of time has been systemically enforced by the Program. Time is a luxury that most, if not all, of the teachers and students scarcely have. Should they indeed do some of the democratic pedagogical practices, the time that would be spent would be the time deducted from the supposed time for other lessons. The more the teachers do this, the larger the obstacle to covering more materials becomes. This would further

elevate the already insurmountable task of finishing, or covering as many as they can, the prescribed learning expectations in time. In short, not only does it prevent teachers and students from sufficiently discussing lessons, but the lack of time also serves as a huge obstacle to the practicability of hooksonian democratic pedagogy in their classes.

This lack of time is not negligible. The impracticability of the hooksonian democratic education is just one case among many. Others include some of the paradigms or practices reflective of progressive education proposed by Filipino scholars. For example, Davatos suggests that critical thinking and ethical reflection should be emphasized in formal education because it will help promote the 'political meritocracy paradigm' (a paradigm aimed at helping the Filipino electorate become better voters through lessening their political ignorance or 'problem of knowledge', as he calls it).<sup>47</sup> Adarlo and Jackson suggest that K-12 teachers should be equipped and empowered to manifest critical consciousness and dialogue in their pedagogical practice so that their students, as well as themselves, will be empowered to 'transform oppressive structures in society.'<sup>48</sup> Moratilla suggests that *testimonios* (i.e., personal narratives – including those from the students themselves - that primarily revolve around experiences of oppression, injustice, and disenfranchisement) be used as a pedagogical strategy to make K-12 education more democratic, empowering, and transformative.<sup>49</sup> Imbong suggests that, at least, the democratic educational space (in formal education and elsewhere) should be characterized, initially, by the recognition and registry of discourses and subjectivities and, eventually, by critique or critical engagement to reflect a 'genuine educational activity' where "ideas challenge ideas not to give way for domination but for validity, and much more truth, to emerge."<sup>50</sup> The application of these noble

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<sup>47</sup> Ian Anthony Davatos, "Democracy's Discontent: The Problem of Knowledge and a Solution," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2018): 82-86.

<sup>48</sup> Genejane Adarlo and Liz Jackson, "For Whom Is K-12 Education: A Critical Look into Twenty-First Century Educational Policy and Curriculum in the Philippines," in *Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Suzanne Choo, Deb Sawch, Allison Villanueva, and Ruth Vinz (New York: Springer, 2017): 219.

<sup>49</sup> Moratilla, "Revisiting Paulo," 265-271.

<sup>50</sup> Regleto Aldrich Imbong, "Badiouian Philosophy, Critical Pedagogy and the K12: Suturing the Educational with the Political," *PHAVISMINDA Journal* 14 (2015): 41.

suggestions would have surely made Philippine education, one way or another, more meaningful, democratic, empowering, and liberatory to both teachers and students. Sadly, however, precisely because they require time – thinking, reading, speaking, and discoursing require time – they, like hooksian democratic pedagogy, appear to many teachers as very idealistic and impractical practices that would unnecessarily add to their already unbearable teaching responsibilities. Not to mention that to reiterate, the lack of time has been systemically put into effect by the Program.

## **Conclusion**

Aimed at improving the quality of Philippine education, the K-12 Program merits laudation. Nevertheless, there is much to be improved about it if it is to reflect an educational system that is truly inclusive, democratic, and liberatory (emancipatory). Joining in the call for its improvement through its critique, we have argued that it makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to practice progressive pedagogies such as those espoused by bell hooks. As such, it does not reflect education that is inclusive, empowering, liberatory (emancipatory), and democratic. And just as these progressive pedagogies have socio-political import, the Program has also its own, that is, it does not serve to better actualize democracy in the Philippines through forming and empowering democratic Filipinos.

Our contention arose from what we argued as the Program's systemic enforcement of the 'racing against time' mode of education for the teachers and students through the congested learning expectations as contained in the nationwide-issued CGs. Using the framework of hooksian democratic pedagogy, we showed: how the pedagogical practices engendered by 'racing against time' promote blind obedience, passivity, and conformity of the students rather than the development of their critical thinking, democratic consciousness, and agency; that there are certain mechanisms that serve to promote the aforementioned banking method practices as well as discourage the practice hooksian democratic pedagogy; and lastly, how the seemingly insignificant issue of 'lack of time' in the educational process serves as a very huge obstacle in the practicability of hooksian democratic pedagogy in our classrooms, or other paradigms and

practices reflective of progressive pedagogies such as those aforementioned suggestions of Filipino scholars for this matter.

With the basic education under the current form of the K-12 Program, democratic pedagogy is just another unrealistic ideal. The discussion and prescription of it, perhaps during conventions, symposia, conferences, or even faculty meetings, would surely be regarded as the ramblings of out-of-touch idealists. Being such, the K-12 program also makes it difficult, if not impossible, for students and teachers alike to experience ‘education as the practice of freedom’ wherein they are empowered to confront and transgress various forms of oppression, domination, or unjust discrimination both in and out of the classroom. As such, this is also a blow to the power of education in positively influencing young people into affecting progressive socio-political movements. Instead of being empowered to speak in the classrooms, which eventually empowers them to speak about other matters, the students are conditioned to be passive and obedient in the classroom and eventually to whoever holds the reins of power. This is a blow to a nation that truly seeks to be democratic. Now, while it is true that Robertson et al. note that ‘improvements to the K-12 curriculum’ will require more than simply reducing the number of learning competencies in the curriculum,’ reducing their number would surely go a long way to help the teachers (and students) stop ‘racing against time.’ Until then, hooks’ democratic pedagogy, or any democratic pedagogies for this matter, will be very difficult, if not impossible, to apply inside the classrooms for teachers and students would always be too busy and preoccupied – ‘racing against time’ – to think, let alone to talk!

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