



Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

Bendum News

April 2020



Envisioning a future for the land, community

In the APC high school, majority of the students come from neighboring villages. It is both a challenge and a joy for them to live in the *dalēpaan* with other young people wishing to pursue an education in Bendum. Many of our students contend with this and other challenges, and it is not always easy to persevere and overcome times when one is tried or feels a bit hopeless, but it is possible when they have a vision and see education not just for themselves but also for the culture as a whole and *gaup* (ancestral domain).

One of the Grade 10 graduates says, “*Dito sa APC, natuto akong mag-aral na may malaking layunin*” (here in APC, I was taught to have a big vision). She and other students see education as key to protecting and sustaining their *gaup*, not only for themselves but also for future generations, and they want to share with other indigenous youth the fruits and learnings of their APC education. A Grade 12 graduate says that indigenous youth need to be empowered to protect the *gaup* in their respective communities, carrying out specific roles and helping in formulating policies that seek a balance in how resources within the *gaup* are used.

Several of our students are overaged. They have left school in the past, took on jobs for a few years, and now feel a sense of wonder

and gratitude that they are given a chance at a complete education. One graduate says that the gift of education is more valuable than material wealth, while another says that education has brought light to her life, and another says that education has given him a guide on how to be a human person and how to examine and discern those things that are not yet within understanding.

The cultural grounding that APC offers also helps students see the value of their cultural heritage. A Grade 12 graduate says it is important to listen to the elders and that the youth should always endeavor in their words, beliefs, and actions to embody what it means to be a Pulangiyēn, as one who strives to uphold peace in all relations and practices respect for Creation and care for others.

This year, APC presents ten Kinder graduates, twenty Grade 6 graduates, sixteen Grade 10 graduates, and six Grade 12 graduates. There is much cause for celebration as we qualify the first batch of Grade 12 students, marking a milestone for the school as we complete the full K-12 program and prepare students for further higher education. This is seen as an attainment of a dream long held by the community of Bendum, that local children and youth can undertake basic education all within the context of their culture and *gaup*. ◆



Far from home: life in the *Dalēpaan*

On the last day of his visit in the upland community of Bendum in the Philippines, Fr Pierre Belanger SJ sat at the veranda of Balay Laudato Si', overlooking the afternoon sky above Ronquillo and Mt. Tago to the west. Classes in Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) had just been dismissed for the day, and the excited chatter of students could be heard from a distance. By the doorway of the Culture and Ecology Center, a few steps from where he sat, a watercolor painting of Joseph accompanying Mary to a safe place to give birth to Jesus hung on the wall to welcome everyone who entered. The painting is called "*Dalēpaan*," which, roughly translated, means "safe rest".

Incidentally, it was also one of the most important words he learned in the *Pinulangiyan* language. The visitor from the Jesuit General Curia later got a deeper understanding of the word through the perspective of indigenous youth who described the *dalēpaan* as the best experience they've had as students of APC.

At first glance, the concept of the *dalēpaan* may seem very simple. One might call it a dorm, for the convenience of explaining the term, as it is a place where students from faraway villages stay during the school year. But the students were quick to explain that it is much more than that.

"We learn a lot in our classrooms, but when we go home to the *dalēpaan*, we continue learning. We learn how to make friends, we learn about humility and self-control. It's where I found myself, where I discovered my abilities and what I can do for others," said Maria Mae



Ampohon. She explained that it is an important part of their culture-based education.

Maria Mae said she used to cry every night when she was new to the *dalēpaan* because she missed her mother. But now, at the end of every school year, she and her friends would cry because they want to stay a bit more. "We already learned to love one another as sisters and brothers," she said.

For Cristy Gumahin, staying in the *dalēpaan* helped her mature. She said she used to be a "spoiled child," and was the cause of several conflicts with the other girls at first. It took time, she said, but through the help of her *Ates* – their house parents – she learned to change for the better.

"I was selfish, but after years of staying in the *dalēpaan*, I realized I was wrong. Now I help my *Ates* care for my companions so they will not be like who I was before," she said. Students call their teachers *Ate* (sister) and *Kuya* (brother), to build their relationship on trust and accompaniment.

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Marjohn Linggay shared he was grateful to have the *Ates* and *Kuyas* to live with them. “Even if my parents are far away, I have the *Ates* and *Kuyas* in the *dalēpaan* who are like family to us. They understand how we feel because they are also far from their homes,” he said.

He first lived there when he was only a Grade 4 student who was always homesick. Now in Grade 10, he is one of the leaders who welcome the younger students and accompany them to the *dalēpaan* life.

Like Marjohn, Gino Suldahan, Grade 11, is also a leader honed in the *dalēpaan*. During study time, assisted natural regeneration on Saturdays, morning prayers, house chores, and talent nights, he is one of the voices most commonly heard, engaging and encouraging the younger and newer members of the family to participate. However, he admitted he found it hard living with the other children years before.

“I found it very difficult to live with other students. We came from different tribes with different languages; we have different personalities and values. It was difficult to understand one another. But eventually we learned to settle our differences and tackle conflicts peacefully,” he said. Peaceful resolution of conflict and keeping a respectful and harmonious relationship within the community are what the *Pulangiyēn* tribe is known for. It is also something that is shared to students and visitors, no matter where they came from.

As they sat in a circle, the students opened up about their dreams and struggles to Fr Belanger. Despite struggling with finding the right English words to express themselves and laughing at some mistakes along the way, and even if the Jesuit priest was already leaving the next day and will soon be on a different side of the world, in that short afternoon, they were able to experience for together what *dalēpaan* essentially is.

Fr Belanger wrote about APC and the different programs in Bendum on <https://jesuits.global/> 

IN PHOTOS: Grade 12 Internship in Water Catchment Management

As part of the K-12 curriculum, Grade 12 students spent 80 hours of work immersion in the Kiasu water catchment under the supervision of Environmental Science for Social Change and with support from the tribal council, community, and sitio leaders. Through the internship, the students learned the importance of forest and water management and experienced working in a professional environment with a research institution.





Towards a holistic, culture-based education

School year 2019-2020 marks the first year that APC is offering vocational classes as part of its Senior High School program. The five Grades 11 and six Grade 12 students were divided into two classes, according to their choice: a dressmaking class and a masonry class, both taught by local resource persons. Students learned to make shorts, skirts, pants, and curtains in Dressmaking. The class was also tasked to sew the cultural attires for graduation. The masonry students, on the other hand, contributed to current construction projects by assisting in toilet construction and in building the new high school administration building.

This year is also the first time that APC is offering formal art and music classes, which contributed greatly in making the students' school experience more balanced and well-rounded, as these classes offered a break from academics and gave students a different sense of accomplishment as they honed their singing and guitar-playing skills and learned to create different kinds of artworks, including origami and those that make use of natural items that come from the *gaup* (ancestral domain). In sports classes, students learned to play frisbee and volleyball.

One of the cornerstones of APC education is its formative subject, taught by a local teacher, which focuses on forming the self and character. When asked about their experience of APC education, many students

say that one of the most important things they have obtained from APC is a greater sense of who they are. The meditative, reflective, creative, and sharing space afforded by the formative class helps students get to know themselves better and reflect more deeply on their experiences, learnings, behaviors, and struggles. They gain confidence and are empowered to face other people and speak about their experiences and their culture while also knowing the importance of listening to the other and what they have to contribute. ◆



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