



INTRODUCTION

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In the wake of Yolanda, the College of Arts and Letters deliberated on ways by which the faculty, administrative staff and students could respond to the devastation brought about by the powerful typhoon. Buoyed up by the enthusiasm generated during the November 11, 2013 Faculty Assembly, a team of professors who had been working in the area of creative psychosocial workshops for trauma survivors, volunteered their services for a project that would be focused on healing. Upon learning that x students from the U.P. Tacloban campus would be accepted for enrollment during the 2nd semester of Academic Year 2013-14, the hastily organized team led by Drs. Ma. Milagros Laurel, Belen Calingacion, Flaudette May Datuin and Yours truly went to work conceptualizing an art-based workshop for the healing of student survivors of Yolanda. We wanted to reach out using the tools and weapons we were most familiar with – poetry, music, visual arts and dance. We wanted these young people, suddenly disoriented and plucked out of their milieu, to experience the healing power of art. And we wanted our own majors, working in the sheltered world of the classroom, to see how the craft they were being disciplined in could operate in the world.

To effect this, we had to pull together a network of people and offices that would allow art to work its magic. We connected to the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs with its network of guidance counselors and dorm managers. We networked with artists, peers at CAL, former students, colleagues from other arts colleges. We enlisted our majors, working in our classes, to support our efforts. Somehow, the word got out. We corralled everyone who walked into our orientation workshop, held on December 11, 2013, into service.

After a blast in social media, we got unlikely financial support. A senior class from a high school in Cavite donated the proceeds from an arts entrepreneurial project to our effort. So did a small art café in Palawan.

Two months after we started planning, the “Sagip Bangon, Isko/Iska” workshops got off the ground. Four seasoned facilitators – Vim Nadera for poetry, Alma Quinto for the visual arts and Albert Dimarucut and Jaime Santos for movement and dance, worked with young people under very difficult circumstances during the months of January and February of 2013. The students would come in to our sessions, exhausted after a grueling day of work, and work with us from 8-10 p.m. Our counselors and faculty would sit with the group and help with the processing until 11 in the evening. The art that emerged in the form of poems, picture books and movement-based drawings revealed the great range of sensibilities and experiences that had been awakened by the traumatic event.

Most of our participants were unaware that there was more to the exercise than the workshops. But after seeing the quality of the work, the organizing team was convinced that only an art exhibit with a performance component would do justice to the art that had been generated. So we enlisted our classes to work on the material. An Art Studies 102 (Human Image in the Arts) class honed their curatorial skills in mounting “Bakawan: An Exhibit by U.P. Students from Yolanda-Hit Leyte and tSamar.” A Speech Communication xxx (Oral Interpretation) class rehearsed, performed and transformed selected poems into powerful oral statements at the opening program.

We opened Bakawan on March 20, 2014. It ran for eleven days. But the team felt that the insights that had been gained and the knowledge that had been generated by the experience needed to be shared with a greater audience. Thus, this special issue of the Philippine Humanities Review.

