

Becoming Kaagapay: The Role of Education in Cultivating Civic Responsibility Among Filipino Graduates

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Abstract:

This article explores the philosophical dimensions of the 2024–2025 Philippine graduation theme, “Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas” (Generation of Unity: Partners for the New Philippines), situating it within the broader discourse on education, ethics, and nation-building. Drawing on thinkers such as Emmanuel Levinas, John Dewey, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maxine Greene, the paper argues that unity is not a passive ideal but an active moral commitment grounded in relational ethics, civic responsibility, and transformative education. It emphasizes the indigenous Filipino concept of kapwa as the foundation for communal solidarity and interdependence. The article further asserts that education should serve as a vehicle for critical consciousness and social renewal, empowering graduates to become co-creators of a just and inclusive society. In facing contemporary challenges such as inequality, climate change, and misinformation, graduates are called to resilience, ethical leadership, and continuous engagement. The philosophical ideal of becoming is proposed as the framework for understanding graduation not as an end, but as the beginning of a lifelong journey of service, learning, and national transformation. Lastly, the paper positions unity as both a philosophical aspiration and a concrete practice in building a better future for the Philippines.

Keywords: Unity, Kapwa, Educational Philosophy, Nation-Building, Ethical Leadership

Introduction:

Graduation is more than a ceremonial rite of passage—it is a symbolic crossing from one threshold of growth to another. It marks the culmination of years of perseverance, learning, and transformation, while also signifying the beginning of a new journey toward greater responsibility and societal contribution.

For students, it is both a personal achievement and a communal celebration, reflecting not only individual success but the collective support of families, educators, and communities. The 2024–2025 End-of-School-Year theme, “Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas” (Generation of Unity: Partners for the New Philippines), captures the essence of this transformative moment. More than a theme, it is a profound call to action—an invitation for the youth to unite in purpose and vision as they step into their roles as the future stewards of the nation. This message urges graduates not only to dream for themselves but to contribute meaningfully to the country’s progress and renewal.

In this light, the theme resonates beyond the classroom and the graduation stage. It speaks to the heart of Filipino values: bayanihan (communal unity), kapwa (shared identity), and pananagutan (responsibility). It encourages graduates to become active participants in the shaping of a just and inclusive society. The phrase “Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas” implies not only companionship but solidarity in the face of the country’s social, political, and economic challenges.

To fully grasp the theme’s significance, we must turn to philosophy—particularly the fields of educational philosophy, ethics, and critical pedagogy. Thinkers like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Emmanuel Levinas offer insights that enrich our understanding of unity, social responsibility, and moral development. Their perspectives illuminate the crucial role of education in cultivating a generation that is not only skilled but also ethically grounded and socially aware.

This article, therefore, serves as a philosophical exploration of the 2024–2025 graduation theme. It examines how the ideals of unity and partnership can be nurtured through education, values formation, and critical consciousness. It seeks to inspire graduates to view themselves not merely as recipients of diplomas, but as vital contributors to a “Bagong Pilipinas”—a new Philippines shaped by compassion, integrity, and collective vision.

Unity as a Philosophical Ideal

Unity, in its truest sense, transcends political alignment or superficial conformity. It is not simply a call for cohesion but a profound philosophical orientation that speaks to our shared humanity. Unity involves an ethical and existential commitment to the well-being of others, a moral imperative to see oneself not as an isolated individual but as a member of an interconnected whole. In a fragmented world that often valorizes individualism and competition, the

theme “Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas” calls on us to reimagine unity as a dynamic moral and civic ideal that holds the promise of a just, compassionate, and progressive nation.

French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas offers a vital lens through which to view this ideal. For Levinas, ethics begins not with abstract principles, but with the immediate and inescapable encounter with the Other. In his seminal work *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas (1969) introduces the concept of the “face of the Other”—the irreducible presence of another human being that calls forth our responsibility.

According to Levinas, the face is not merely a physical feature but a philosophical sign of vulnerability and ethical demand. To see the face of the Other is to be summoned to respond with care, dignity, and justice. In the context of unity, this Levinasian encounter suggests that true solidarity cannot arise without first acknowledging and respecting the inherent worth of others.

In the Filipino context, this abstract ethical idea finds resonance in the indigenous philosophical concept of *kapwa*. Filipino social scientist Virgilio Enriquez (1992), regarded as the father of Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology), described *kapwa* as the core of Filipino social interaction—a shared identity between self and other. Unlike Western notions of the self that emphasize autonomy and separation, *kapwa* implies interconnectedness and mutual recognition. When we treat others as *kapwa*, we do not see them as strangers or as separate from us. Instead, we relate to them as fellow human beings whose joys and struggles are intertwined with our own. *Pagkakaisa*, or unity, thus springs not from forced consensus, but from an acknowledgment of this deep-seated relationality. It becomes an ethical commitment to honor and uphold the dignity of others because we understand them as extensions of ourselves.

This philosophical orientation toward relationality and ethical responsibility is critical in forming what Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire called “conscientization”—a deep awareness of one’s social reality and the commitment to transform it. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of dialogue and mutual recognition in the educational process.

For Freire, education is not a neutral act; it is either an instrument for liberation or for oppression. A unity that is imposed from above, that demands silence and submission, is not unity at all—it is domination. True unity, in Freire’s framework, can only be achieved through dialogue that empowers individuals to become co-creators of their own futures. Filipino graduates, therefore, must not merely become passive recipients of inherited traditions or top-down directives, but active participants in shaping a “Bagong Pilipinas” rooted in democratic values, inclusivity, and critical reflection.

This understanding of unity demands a re-examination of the nature of leadership. If unity is built upon ethical responsibility, mutual recognition, and critical awareness, then leaders must embody these values not just in word, but in action. Leadership, as envisioned in the theme “Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa,” is no longer about command and control—it is about accompaniment, humility, and moral imagination. A unified generation must produce servant-leaders who, echoing Confucian ideals, rule by virtue and moral example rather than by force or fear. In Confucian philosophy, the idea of *ren* (benevolence or humaneness) is central to good governance. The ideal leader is someone who prioritizes harmony, respects others, and leads with compassion (Yao, 2000). In the Philippine setting, this translates to leaders who are grounded in community, responsive to the needs of the marginalized, and committed to promoting the common good.

In line with this, unity also requires the cultivation of certain virtues—empathy, humility, patience, and courage. These virtues are not merely individual traits but collective capacities that must be nurtured through education, culture, and shared experience. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, posited that virtue is developed through habituation—by repeatedly acting in accordance with moral principles until they become second nature (Aristotle, trans. 2009). Educational institutions, then, have a crucial role to play in fostering these virtues. Schools must go beyond academic instruction to become spaces where students learn to live together, to resolve conflicts peacefully, and to collaborate toward shared goals. By doing so, they lay the foundation for a society where unity is not a slogan but a lived reality.

In practice, this means embracing a pedagogy that values dialogue over dogma, cooperation over competition, and service over self-interest. Educational practices should be aligned with what Nel Noddings (2012) called the “ethics of care.” Noddings argued that caring relationships should be the foundation of all educational endeavors. A school guided by care does not only aim to produce competent professionals but responsible citizens who are attuned to the needs of others. In a generation of unity, graduates must carry this ethic of care into their communities, workplaces, and national engagements. They must see unity not as an abstract ideal, but as a concrete commitment to stand with others—especially the vulnerable—in building a just and humane society.

Unity, however, is not without its challenges. In an increasingly polarized and fragmented world, the temptation to retreat into echo chambers and ideological silos is strong. Social media, while a tool for connection, can also become

a breeding ground for division, misinformation, and hostility. The youth must therefore cultivate what philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984) called “communicative rationality”—the ability to engage in reasoned discourse with others, even those who hold differing views. Habermas envisioned a society where democratic deliberation is guided not by coercion or manipulation, but by mutual understanding and respect. A generation of unity must rise above tribalism and embrace the difficult yet necessary task of listening, reasoning, and dialoguing across differences.

Moreover, unity must be inclusive and intersectional. It must recognize the multiplicity of identities—gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status—that shape our experiences. As political philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) warned, unity that erases difference can easily become a tool of oppression. To be truly unified, a society must value diversity as a strength rather than a threat. Graduates must be taught to see others not as competitors, but as collaborators in the collective task of nation-building.

This inclusive unity calls for structural changes that promote equity in access to education, healthcare, and opportunities, and for policies that empower rather than marginalize.

Ultimately, the call for unity is a call for transformation. It is a rejection of fatalism and apathy, and an affirmation of agency, hope, and collective responsibility. As the philosopher John Dewey (1916) wrote, “Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.” The graduates of this year, the so-called *Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa*, must take up the challenge of birthing a new democratic ethos—one that values not just freedom, but fraternity; not just rights, but responsibilities; not just progress, but justice.

Unity is not a destination but a journey—a continuous act of building bridges, healing wounds, and imagining better futures together. Rooted in the ethical responsibility of Levinas, the relational concept of *kapwa*, the critical pedagogy of Freire, the virtue ethics of Aristotle, and the ethics of care advocated by Noddings, unity emerges as a philosophical ideal that demands both reflection and action. For Filipino graduates of today, unity is not just a theme to be recited during ceremonies, but a lifelong principle to live by. As partners for a New Philippines, they are called not only to dream of a better nation but to co-create it through compassion, collaboration, and unwavering hope.

Education as a Vehicle for Unity and Nation-Building

Education has long been recognized as a powerful force for societal transformation. As John Dewey, one of the most influential philosophers of education, asserted, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (Dewey, 1916, p. 239). This perspective highlights education not merely as a preparatory process for adulthood or employment but as a fundamental mechanism for shaping how individuals understand, engage with, and contribute to society.

Within the Philippine context, this understanding becomes essential in light of the 2024–2025 graduation theme, “*Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas*” (Generation of Unity: Partners for the New Philippines). The theme calls for a generation that not only values solidarity and national unity but also actively participates in building a just and thriving nation. Education, therefore, must be viewed as a vital vehicle for nurturing such a generation.

Dewey (1916) argued that education and democracy are intricately linked, as both depend on active participation, communication, and cooperation. A democratic society thrives on informed citizens who possess the skills and disposition to engage in collective decision-making. Education must thus foster critical thinking, collaboration, and a sense of social responsibility.

In contrast, an educational system that prioritizes memorization, obedience, and competition produces individuals who are ill-equipped to participate in democratic life. For the Philippines to realize its vision of unity and progress, it must move beyond outdated models of education that focus solely on producing labor for the market. It must instead embrace a transformative approach that empowers students to become ethical, engaged, and socially conscious citizens.

This transformation requires an educational philosophy that emphasizes not only knowledge acquisition but also moral development, empathy, and active citizenship. Freire (1970), in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, emphasized the importance of dialogue, reflection, and praxis in education. For him, learners are not empty vessels to be filled with information but co-creators of knowledge who must engage critically with the world around them. He believed that education should awaken a sense of agency and commitment to social justice. In this view, Filipino students are not passive recipients of instruction but emerging leaders who must be equipped to challenge inequality, advocate for marginalized communities, and build inclusive institutions.

Education rooted in democratic and liberatory principles aligns with the Filipino concept of *bayanihan*, or communal unity and cooperation. In Filipino culture, the success of one is the success of all. Schools should reflect and reinforce this value by fostering inclusive and collaborative environments. Classrooms can serve as microcosms of democratic society where students learn to listen to diverse perspectives, resolve conflicts peacefully, and work toward shared

goals. Teachers become facilitators of moral development and social consciousness, guiding learners not only in academic mastery but also in cultivating respect, compassion, and civic engagement.

Such a vision for education finds further support in the philosophy of Amartya Sen (1999), a Nobel laureate economist and philosopher, who introduced the concept of *capability* as central to development. Sen argues that true development is about expanding the freedoms and opportunities available to individuals, allowing them to live lives they value. Education plays a critical role in this process by enhancing individuals' capacities to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and political life. A unified and empowered generation, therefore, is one that has access to quality education that nurtures their talents, broadens their perspectives, and instills a deep sense of social responsibility.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the critical role of education in nation-building. The K to 12 Basic Education Program aims to produce graduates who are "holistically developed Filipino learners with 21st-century skills" (DepEd, 2012). However, realizing this vision requires more than curriculum reform; it demands a philosophical shift in how education is perceived and practiced.

The integration of values education, citizenship training, and socio-cultural awareness into all learning areas is crucial for shaping young people into responsible nation-builders. The goal is not only to prepare students for work but to empower them to become active contributors to a *Bagong Pilipinas*—a new Philippines characterized by unity, equity, and progress.

Graduates of today are heirs to the sacrifices and hopes of previous generations. Their education is not solely their own achievement but a product of collective investment—from parents and teachers to communities and government institutions. As such, they bear a moral responsibility to use their education not just for personal advancement but for the greater good. Dewey (1938) emphasized that education must be continuous with life experience and must aim toward social ends. Learning should be connected to real-world challenges—poverty, climate change, inequality—and should equip learners to devise solutions grounded in empathy and informed by ethical reasoning.

Education, therefore, must cultivate not only cognitive abilities but also affective and moral dimensions of human development. Noddings (2005), through her *ethics of care*, emphasizes the centrality of relationships in the educational process. A caring pedagogy encourages students to see others not as obstacles or competitors but as fellow human beings deserving of dignity and support. Such an approach complements the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa*, or shared humanity, which underpins the theme of unity. Students who are nurtured in caring educational environments are more likely to become compassionate leaders, bridge-builders, and advocates for the common good.

In practical terms, education that fosters unity and nation-building must be accessible, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Inequalities in access to quality education—often along lines of geography, income, and language—undermine social cohesion and perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion.

As Sen (1999) contends, freedom is curtailed when people are denied opportunities to develop their capabilities. The Philippine government and civil society must work together to ensure that education systems are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and tailored to local contexts. This includes investing in teacher development, expanding resources for underserved communities, and promoting mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), which affirms cultural identity while enhancing learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2016).

Moreover, schools should be sites of democratic practice where students experience meaningful participation and shared governance. According to Biesta (2011), the purpose of education is not just qualification and socialization, but also subjectification—the formation of individuals who can act autonomously and responsibly. Involving students in decision-making processes, community projects, and civic initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and belonging. These experiences lay the foundation for democratic citizenship and social solidarity. They prepare graduates to become *kaagapay*—partners in nation-building who are equipped with the skills, values, and dispositions necessary to contribute meaningfully to Philippine society.

The graduation ceremony, then, is not merely a celebration of academic success but a public acknowledgment of this profound responsibility. It marks a turning point where learners become leaders, and students become citizens. As they step into the next phase of their lives, graduates carry with them not only diplomas but also the collective dreams of a nation. They are the torchbearers of unity, tasked with transforming the knowledge they have gained into action for the common good. The theme "*Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa*" thus becomes a living philosophy—one that calls for education grounded in truth, compassion, and justice.

Education is an indispensable vehicle for unity and nation-building. It has the power to shape not only minds but also hearts; not only individuals but entire communities. Drawing from the philosophies of Dewey, Freire, Sen, and Noddings, we see that meaningful education must be democratic, ethical, inclusive, and transformative. In the

Philippine context, this means reimagining schools as spaces of *pagkakaisa*, where every learner is empowered to become a partner in building a just and prosperous nation. As Filipino graduates step forward into their future, they must carry with them not just the tools for success, but the vision, values, and courage to become co-creators of a *Bagong Pilipinas*.

Critical Pedagogy and Empowerment

Education has long been viewed as a powerful instrument for personal development and societal progress. Yet, the nature of this development hinges on how education is conceived and delivered. Is it a means of domestication, where learners are molded to fit into pre-existing systems of power and inequality? Or is it a liberating force that enables individuals to challenge and transform those very systems? Paulo Freire, a seminal Brazilian educator and philosopher, believed in the latter. His groundbreaking work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), calls for a radical rethinking of the educational process, one that places learners not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in their own liberation.

At the heart of Freire's educational philosophy is the concept of *conscientização*—critical consciousness. This refers to the process by which learners become aware of the socio-political structures that shape their lives and are empowered to take transformative action. Freire (1970) argued that education should be dialogical and participatory. It must reject the "banking model" of education—where teachers deposit knowledge into students' empty minds—and instead embrace a pedagogy of dialogue, reflection, and praxis. For Freire, the goal of education is not to reproduce the status quo but to enable learners to critically analyze and change it.

In the context of the 2024–2025 graduation theme, "*Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas*" (Generation of Unity: Partners for the New Philippines), Freire's ideas take on profound relevance. The call to become a partner in the creation of a "New Philippines" aligns with the Freirean vision of education as a vehicle for social transformation. A partner (*kaagapay*) is not someone who stands on the sidelines, but someone who walks alongside others in pursuit of a shared goal. In this case, that goal is a just, inclusive, and unified nation. To fulfill this role, graduates must cultivate critical consciousness and assume the responsibility of engaging with the moral and political questions that define their time.

Critical pedagogy emphasizes that education should not be neutral. According to Giroux (2011), all education is inherently political, and to deny this is to support the existing power structures by default. Teachers and schools, therefore, must position themselves as spaces of resistance where students can interrogate dominant ideologies and envision alternative futures. This educational approach is essential in the Philippine context, where colonial history, economic inequality, and political corruption have long stifled social mobility and civic empowerment (Constantino, 1970; David, 2002). If graduates are to be true agents of national transformation, they must be educated in a system that not only transmits knowledge but also encourages the questioning of unjust systems.

Freire's pedagogy insists that true knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, rooted in learners' lived experiences. This notion resonates with the indigenous Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa*—a relational understanding of self and others that emphasizes empathy, respect, and mutual recognition (Enriquez, 1992). In a critically engaged classroom, students are not just evaluated for their ability to memorize content but for their capacity to relate, reflect, and act. When students see the connection between what they learn in school and the conditions in their communities, education becomes relevant and empowering. As hooks (1994) points out, the classroom can become "the most radical space of possibility" when it values the voices of all participants and encourages them to envision liberation.

The challenge for Philippine education, then, is to foster environments where critical pedagogy can thrive. Unfortunately, the current educational system often falls short of this ideal. High-stakes testing, rigid curricula, and teacher-centered methodologies continue to dominate, leaving little room for critical dialogue or student agency (Oracion, 2013). Moreover, political pressures sometimes discourage educators from engaging students in discussions about social justice, human rights, or historical accountability. In such a context, promoting Freirean pedagogy is an act of courage. It requires educators to go beyond their formal roles and to act as facilitators of transformation.

There are, however, promising initiatives that reflect the principles of critical pedagogy in the Philippine setting. Alternative learning systems (ALS), community schools, and indigenous education programs have demonstrated the power of learner-centered, socially responsive education (de Guzman & Javier, 2013). For example, programs that involve youth in participatory action research or community-based projects show how students can become leaders in addressing local issues, from environmental protection to poverty alleviation. Such initiatives embody Freire's idea of praxis—the dynamic interplay of reflection and action in pursuit of justice.

Graduation, within this philosophical framework, is not an end but a beginning. It is a rite of passage that marks not only academic accomplishment but also the assumption of civic responsibility. The metaphor of walking alongside

(*kaagapay*) others in building a New Philippines suggests a collective journey toward a more equitable and humane society. But for this journey to be meaningful, graduates must commit themselves to a lifelong process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. As Freire (1998) later wrote in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, “to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge” (p. 30). This perspective demands that graduates continually engage with new ideas, challenge injustice, and act in solidarity with marginalized communities.

The role of critical pedagogy also becomes more urgent in today’s digital age, where misinformation, algorithmic bias, and political polarization threaten democratic discourse. According to Kellner and Share (2007), media literacy and critical digital pedagogy are essential components of 21st-century education. They argue that students must be taught to analyze media texts critically, recognize propaganda, and use digital platforms for civic engagement. In the Philippines, where social media has played a decisive role in shaping public opinion and elections, digital literacy is not just a technical skill—it is a civic necessity. A critically literate graduate is one who can discern truth from manipulation, resist disinformation, and use technology to promote collective well-being.

Critical pedagogy also recognizes the intersectionality of oppression. Issues such as gender inequality, ethnic marginalization, and economic disparity must be addressed holistically in the learning process. For instance, integrating feminist pedagogy, environmental justice, and decolonial perspectives into the curriculum helps students see the complexity of social issues and the need for multifaceted solutions. According to Kumashiro (2000), anti-oppressive education must intentionally disrupt traditional norms and challenge students to confront discomfort and contradiction. This disruption is not to provoke for its own sake but to cultivate empathy, awareness, and a deepened sense of moral responsibility.

Furthermore, critical pedagogy acknowledges that empowerment must be collective. It rejects the individualistic notion of success and embraces solidarity as a guiding principle. As Freire (1970) contended, liberation is a communal act: “Nobody liberates anybody else; nobody liberates themselves alone. People liberate themselves in fellowship with each other” (p. 85). This belief underscores the importance of building democratic learning communities where students and teachers co-create knowledge and share power. In this light, *pagkakaisa* (unity) is not superficial agreement but deep, ongoing collaboration grounded in shared ethical commitment.

The success of this pedagogical model relies not only on visionary teachers but also on supportive institutions and policies. Schools must be spaces of freedom rather than control, dialogue rather than imposition. Teacher training programs must prepare educators to use critical, inclusive, and culturally responsive strategies. Policymakers must ensure that curricula reflect the lived realities of Filipino learners and provide space for critical engagement. According to UNESCO (2017), education systems must prioritize inclusion, participation, and empowerment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The Philippines, as part of the global education community, must invest in educational reforms that affirm these principles.

Ultimately, critical pedagogy teaches us that education is not neutral terrain. It either reproduces inequality or challenges it. As graduates step into the world, they carry not only their diplomas but also the responsibility to shape the nation’s future. They must become critically conscious citizens who can challenge unjust systems, speak truth to power, and work in solidarity with others to build a better world. “*Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas*” is not merely a slogan; it is a philosophical imperative—a call to act with courage, compassion, and conscience.

Critical pedagogy offers a powerful lens through which to interpret the graduation theme. It reframes graduation not as an endpoint, but as an invitation to participate in the ongoing project of nation-building. Inspired by Freire’s emancipatory vision, empowered by their education, and guided by a commitment to justice and unity, today’s graduates are called not only to imagine a better Philippines but to create it—through dialogue, critical reflection, and collective action.

Challenges Ahead: Resilience and Continuity

To be *kaagapay*—a companion, an ally, a partner—in nation-building is not merely to march in harmony during moments of celebration, but to walk alongside others even in times of trial, ambiguity, and deep uncertainty. The path to a *Bagong Pilipinas* (New Philippines) is not a smooth one; it is marked by obstacles, contradictions, and ongoing struggles. In a nation still grappling with widespread socio-economic inequality, environmental degradation, historical injustice, and digital manipulation, unity is no longer a rhetorical aspiration—it is a necessary condition for national transformation. The challenge is not simply to remain together, but to move forward with shared conviction and collective resilience.

In this effort, the role of education cannot be overstated. Maxine Greene (1978), an influential American educational philosopher, emphasized that education should awaken students to their social realities and instill in them a sense of agency. She spoke of “*wide-awakeness*”—the state of being fully alert to the conditions of one’s world, and fully engaged in imagining it otherwise. “We must learn to look at things as if they could be otherwise,” Greene wrote, advocating for a pedagogy that stirs moral imagination and social commitment (Greene, 1978, p. 42). In this sense,

Filipino graduates must not only acknowledge the realities of the world they inherit, but actively participate in its reshaping.

Resilience, in this philosophical light, must be understood beyond the realm of endurance. It is not about silently bearing hardship or adjusting to systemic injustice. True resilience is transformative—it includes the courage to resist oppression, the capacity to learn from setbacks, and the willingness to build anew. In the Philippine context, where disasters—both natural and man-made—are a regular occurrence, resilience has often been romanticized. The Filipino people are celebrated for their ability to smile through floods, earthquakes, and economic instability. While such emotional strength is admirable, it must be matched with systemic solutions and critical engagement. Otherwise, resilience becomes a mask that hides structural failures rather than a virtue that fuels change.

As the country faces the compounded crises of the 21st century—climate change, disinformation, food insecurity, political instability, and educational inequality—today's youth are at the frontlines. Climate change, in particular, presents an existential threat to the archipelago. Rising sea levels, intensifying typhoons, and vanishing biodiversity threaten not just the environment but the very livelihoods of millions of Filipinos. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, the Philippines is among the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate-related disasters (Eckstein et al., 2021). Young people, therefore, cannot afford to be indifferent. They must become environmental stewards, eco-literate citizens who understand sustainability not as an abstract policy but as a daily ethical practice.

Similarly, the challenge of digital disinformation has become a major threat to democracy and social cohesion. Social media has transformed the landscape of public discourse in the Philippines, allowing both empowerment and exploitation. The 2022 Philippine elections highlighted how political manipulation through fake news, troll farms, and historical distortion can influence national decision-making and undermine truth (Mendoza et al., 2022). In such an environment, digital resilience means more than knowing how to use technology—it means having the critical thinking skills to discern facts from propaganda, and the ethical grounding to stand up for truth, even when it is inconvenient.

Yet, amidst these challenges, the Filipino youth have also shown extraordinary strength, creativity, and leadership. From community-based mutual aid networks to youth-led environmental movements like Youth for Climate Hope and #FridaysForFuturePH, young people have taken action where institutions have faltered. These expressions of *bayanihan*—a traditional Filipino value of communal cooperation—are modern acts of resistance, solidarity, and hope. Bayanihan today is no longer just about carrying a neighbor's house on one's shoulders; it is about uplifting communities through shared resources, mutual respect, and inclusive action.

Resilience, then, is deeply tied to *paninindigan*—conviction. It is not enough to bounce back from hardship; one must bounce forward with clarity of purpose. The Filipino graduate of today must stand for what is right, even when it is unpopular. They must carry the torch of *paninindigan* in classrooms, in marketplaces, in digital platforms, and in public service. According to philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010), education for global citizenship must cultivate in learners the ability to imagine others' realities, critically reflect on injustice, and take compassionate action. In a fragmented and polarized world, this kind of education is what sustains democracy and dignity.

Moreover, the idea of continuity—the second focus of this reflection—reminds us that building a better Philippines is not a sprint, but a relay. Each generation inherits unfinished tasks and passes on new responsibilities. It is not enough to hope that the next leaders will do better; every citizen must contribute something to the long arc of transformation. Education must, therefore, foster a mindset of lifelong learning, where knowledge is constantly re-evaluated, and where growth is both personal and collective. Filipino resilience must include intellectual humility and the willingness to evolve.

To move forward as a *kaagapay* in nation-building also means recognizing that unity is not sameness. Diversity—whether cultural, religious, linguistic, or ideological—is part of the nation's strength. The Philippines is home to over 100 ethno-linguistic groups, each with its own traditions and histories. Unity, in this case, should mean solidarity across difference, not erasure of difference. It is the task of educators, leaders, and citizens to build inclusive spaces where plural voices are heard, where marginalized communities are empowered, and where conflict becomes an opportunity for dialogue rather than division.

Ultimately, the challenges that lie ahead should not intimidate graduates, but awaken them. The call to be *kaagapay* is both a burden and a blessing—it asks for responsibility, but it also offers meaning. It tells the graduate: you are not alone. You are part of a generation that walks together, dreams together, and acts together. You are part of a longer story of struggle and triumph. As José Rizal once said, "The youth is the hope of the nation." But hope must be nurtured through action, rooted in compassion, and sharpened by reflection.

In conclusion, resilience and continuity are not passive virtues—they are active commitments. They ask us to stay awake, to stay connected, and to stay engaged. To be *kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas* is to face the future with both courage and humility. It is to choose cooperation over cynicism, action over apathy, and justice over convenience. As graduates enter a complex and changing world, may they carry with them not just the knowledge they have

gained, but the values, vision, and virtues that make them true partners in building a Philippines that is inclusive, sustainable, and united.

Conclusion:

Graduation is not merely a culmination of academic pursuits—it is the threshold of transformation, the beginning of a lifelong journey of becoming. The 2024–2025 theme, Henerasyon ng Pagkakaisa: Kaagapay sa Bagong Pilipinas (Generation of Unity: Partners for the New Philippines), is more than a ceremonial slogan. It is a profound philosophical invitation to reimagine one's role in society—not as a passive recipient of education, but as an active participant in the shaping of a better future.

In a world marked by rapid change and complex challenges, the task of today's graduates is not just to succeed individually, but to thrive collectively. They are called not only to build careers, but to build communities; not only to chase ambition, but to embody compassion. As the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1946) asserted, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself." The future of the Philippines depends not solely on policies or programs, but on the ethical choices and sustained commitments of its people—especially its youth.

To become kaagapay in nation-building means embracing the ideals of solidarity, integrity, and shared purpose. It is the daily work of unity, the courage to stand for truth, and the humility to serve others. The graduates of this generation must become the unity they proclaim, the leaders they hope for, and the change they seek.

May their lives reflect not only academic success but also civic responsibility, moral clarity, and visionary leadership. In doing so, they do not simply graduate from school—they graduate into the noble vocation of building a just, inclusive, and flourishing nation. They do not end their journey; they begin their legacy.

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