

Education as a Liminal Pivot in *Gustong Mag-Aral ni Sula* (*Sula Wants to Study*)

by Virgilio S. Almario: An Exploration of T'Boli Children's
Cultural Participation as Performances

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Abstract

Viewing cultural practices as performances enables one to understand everyday actions and interactions as reflections of their own enculturation. It enables the participants and outsiders alike to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they co-exist. The perspective of performing cultures can provide a model of communicative practice in which culture and performance are inextricably joined and integral to the communal experience of everyday life.

Gustong Mag-Aral ni Sula (*Sula Wants to Study*) is a children's book that tells the story of Sula— a four-year old *T'boli* girl. The *T'boli*, an ethnic group inhabiting the highlands of southwestern Mindanao, Philippines, are known for their weaving tradition *t'nalak*. The *t'nalak* cloth is woven from abacá fibers by, traditionally, female “dream weavers” —the patterns of the *t'nalak* cloth are inspired by their dreams. Adopting dreams as a literary device, the story discusses about Sula's dreams which are often about studying, writing, and reading with other *T'boli* children.

This study analyzes *Gustong Mag-Aral ni Sula* as a performance of culture using Schechner's perspectives on performance and post-culturalism in understanding culture within the activity of everyday life. It explains how the book allowed for a glimpse of the cultural practices and current sociological status and struggles of the *T'boli* children —of how Sula's story was able to illustrate the enculturation of education and explore the liminal state between preserving cultural practices and accommodating the demands of the modern society.

Keyword: performance of culture, T'boli, Schechner