

## A CRITIQUE OF K-12 PHILIPPINE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

*This Paper was presented on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the Society for the Philosophical Study of Education-Philippines, March 1, 2014, held at Paulino Cayco Hall, Arellano University, Philippines. The paper presents the fears and loopholes of the K-12 system and its implementation in the context of the Philippines. Drawing on the current discourse, studies and loud views, the author concludes that if the goal is to improve the nation's student achievement then the real solution is improving the quality of teachers because "Students don't fail, teachers do."*

Keywords: K-12 education system. Philippines education reform. Curriculum

### Products of a 10-year public education

To date, Filipinos are a product of a 10-year public educational system. Our outstanding leaders were educated in a 10-year public school system. Our former Senator Rene Saguisag, a human rights champion and currently a Professor at the College of Law at Arellano and San Beda College shares his educational experience and insights:

I was born 1939. In 1946, from Mauban, Quezon, we moved to Makati. I enrolled in Makati Elem and had no birth certificate. Asked to reach an ear with the opposite hand, I did, and was enrolled. I spent two or three weeks in Grade I and then was accelerated to Grade II. I graduated in 1951. I then went to Rizal High, where, like in Makati, I was always in Sec. 1 but my bright classmates and I would tease one another if caught studying. We just sort of enjoyed life but learned from one another.

Our valedictorian was No. 1 in chemical engineering. Another classmate was No. 3 in the PMA. At least two topped in engineering. In law, one was No. 5 in the bar, I was No. 6, among 5,500 candidates in 1963. I attended Harvard and our valedictorian attended Caltech, on full scholarships.

Uncle Jovy Salonga, Neptalie Gonzalez, Bobbit Sanchez, Dante Santos, Lucio San Pedro, Gel Reloj, Gen. Ernesto Carolina, et al. attended Rizal Hi. So did Pat and Wilma Tiamzon, honor grads, who lead the NPA today. Rene Cayetano was in Rizal Hi for a year or two.

Henry Brooks Adams said a teacher affects eternity. We had very, very good, dedicated teachers from pre-WW I, in Makati and Pasig.

If we don't have similar teachers today, even K-20 may not work. Where have most of the good teachers gone, gone abroad everyone? - with all due respect to those who are around.

In the 60's, the Philippines was a study destination of choice for students from the Asia-Pacific region. The influx of foreign students was a reflection of the quality of teaching and the use of English as the medium of instruction.

### **A 10-year basic education cycle**

As cited in *The Primer on the New K-12 Educational System* by Patricia Tanya-Velasco on March 6, 2012:

At present, the Philippines is the only country in Asia and among the three remaining countries in the world that uses a 10-year basic education cycle. According to a presentation made by the South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO-INNOTECH) on Additional Years in Philippine Basic Education (2010), the comparative data on duration of Basic and Pre-University Education in Asia shows that the Philippines allots 10 years not just for the basic education cycle but also for the pre-university education while all the other countries have either 11 or 12 years in their basic education cycle.

Achievement scores highlight our students' poor performance in national examinations. The National Achievement Test (NAT) results for grade 6 in SY 2009-2010 showed only a 69.21% passing rate while the NAT results for high school is at a low 46.38%. Moreover, international tests results in 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science study (TIMSS) show that the Philippines ranked 34th out of 38 countries in HS Math and 43rd out of 46 countries in HS II Science. Moreover, the Philippines ranked the lowest in 2008 even with only the science high schools joining the Advanced Mathematics category.

The present curriculum is described as congested. This means that students do not get enough time to perform tasks because the curriculum is designed to be taught in a span of 12 years and not 10 years. The more obvious result of this is the fact that most high school students graduate without the readiness to take upon higher education or employment. These students are not equipped with the basic skills or competencies needed at work.

### **Core competencies and skills needed by any individual across cultures**

President Benigno Simeon Aquino III signed into law on May 15, 2013 The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 or the K-to-12. Now that it has become a law, schools all over the country have to brace for the implementation and the effects of the K to 12 program.

The K to 12 is aimed at addressing the deficiency of the Philippine educational system particularly in the basic education, the elementary and high school, in order to meet the standards of the international education criteria and for the students to be at par with the students in neighboring countries.

According to the DepEd discussion paper (2010), the K-12 curriculum aims to enable every child "to achieve mastery of core competencies and skills" (p.6) and develop tracks based on the student's interests and competencies.

What are the core competencies and skills needed by any individual across cultures? The three R's: reading, writing and arithmetic.

When are these core competencies learned? Research has shown that the three 3R's should commence at age 3 or for some even earlier.

Philosopher Froebel, known as the Father of kindergarten, established the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837. Influenced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Herbart, Froebel believed children

were social creatures, and learning was the most natural and efficient through activity and play was an essential part of learning. He believed that teaching methods between a younger and older child ought to be vastly different.

N. Gerry House (2007) in "Educating All the City's Children," *Schools that Learn: The single most powerful thing that a community can do is to provide children with high-quality preschool experiences from birth through age five. It doesn't matter whether it's through government, community, private, or home-based preschools, as long as there are high quality learning centers.*

To Maria Montessori, you will miss the bus if you commence at age 7. Extensive researches have shown the importance of Kindergarten-Grade 3.

Consequences of not reading by Grade Level by Grade 3:

- Students cannot successfully do homework or school work
- Students' self-concepts suffer, behavior deteriorates.
- Students face a 90 percent probability of dropping out of school.
- During their lifetime they are likely to be unemployed or underemployed, or, even worse, unemployed. (Caroly, Greenwood, Everingham, Hoube, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1998)

### **Revisiting the Essentialist School**

The school of essentialism must be revisited. Essentialism refers to the "traditional" or "Back to the Basics" approach to education. It is so named because it strives to instill students with the "essentials" of academic knowledge and character development. The term essentialism as an educational philosophy was originally popularized in the 1930s by the American educator William Bagley (1874-1946). The philosophy itself, however, had been the dominant approach to education in America from the beginnings of American history.

Essentialists believe that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic, disciplined way. The emphasis in this conservative perspective is on intellectual and moral standards that schools should teach. The core of the curriculum is essential knowledge and skills and academic rigor. Although this educational philosophy is similar in some ways to Perennialism, Essentialists accept the idea that this core curriculum may change. Schooling should be practical, preparing students to become valuable members of society. It should focus on facts--the objective reality out there--and "the basics," training students to read, write, speak, and compute clearly and logically. Schools should not try to set or influence policies. Students should be taught hard work, respect for authority, and discipline. Teachers are to help students keep their non-productive instincts in check, such as aggression or mindlessness.

In the essentialist system, students are required to master a set body of information and basic techniques for their grade level before they are promoted to the next higher grade. The content gradually moves towards more complex skills and detailed knowledge.

## Evidence from correlating reading proficiency and academic success

Educational researchers have found that there is a strong correlation between reading and academic success. "Research findings in applied linguistics and reading research consistently show a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages, from the primary school right through to university level: students who read a lot and who understand what they read usually attain good grades" (Pretorious, 2000). An ACT news release (Aug. 17, 2005) stated, "Reading skills are critical to a student's success in college courses across the board... students who don't have adequate reading comprehension skills are likely to struggle." Proficient reading skills are inextricably linked to problem solving, critical thinking, writing, researching, reasoning, and creativity. In other words, a student who is a good reader is more likely to do well in school and pass exams than a student who is a weak reader.

High school public school teachers complain about the poor reading skills of their students. In a public high school in Taguig City where students are in sections homogeneously, teachers struggle with the lessons as there are students who cannot even read. In the first semester of this school year, I had 4 students who are public high school teachers and revealed the primary concern they faced in the classroom: non-readers, poor readers, and poor numeracy skills.

All incoming freshmen of Arellano University for the past years take 2 diagnostic tests: Gates Mac-Ginitie Reading Test and the Test of Mathematical Abilities Test since school year 2007 up to the present time. The results reveal that for the past 7 years, 83% of the freshmen students in the Legarda campus obtained reading scores (vocabulary comprehension) within the Stanine 1-3 range interpreted as struggling, with a grade equivalent of 3.0-7.4.

The research on the reading scores and the Nursing Board Examinations of the nursing students at Arellano University, published in the Arellano University Philippine Education Quarterly June 2009, showed that the November 2008 board placers had above average vocabulary and comprehension levels. The data of the students who failed in the November 2008 board examination revealed that the vocabulary level of 75% of the students were within Stanine 1-3 interpreted as below average.

The research on the Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Skills Among Graduate School Students of Arellano University, Manila, School Year 2008-2009, published at the Arellano University Graduate School Journal March 2009, revealed that:

1. Graduate students for the period first semester of school year 2008-2009 obtained a vocabulary stanine score of 4.6, with a grade equivalent of 13.4 and a percentile rank of 45.55. These correspond to a vocabulary level of **Below Average**.
2. Likewise, graduate students for the same period got a comprehension stanine score of 4.8, with a grade equivalent of 13.5 and percentile rank of 47.72. These indicate a comprehension level of **Below Average**.
3. There is a positive and substantial relationship between the level of comprehension skills and level of vocabulary skills.

Research supports a strong correlation between students' comprehension and their knowledge of text structures (Robb, 2003; Fielding & Pearson, 1994) and between students' mathematical comprehension and their knowledge and use of multiple representations (Piez & Voxman, 1997; Romberg et al., 1993). Since narrative text differs from expository text, knowledge of narrative text structure is helpful when completing expository tasks like reading or writing mathematics. Teachers should offer instruction in understanding the text structures and vocabulary associated with respective course material (Robb, 2003). For example, mathematics teachers should demonstrate how the use of vocabulary, text structure, ideational sequencing, and etc., all work in tandem to create a text appropriate for the understanding of mathematics.

The research on the Reading and Math Scores of Freshmen College Students of Arellano University conducted in 2010, published at the Arellano University Graduate School Journal March 2010, with a sample of 906 students, revealed a positive correlation between reading vocabulary and reading comprehension, reading comprehension and math problem-solving skills.

### **Critical role of teachers**

To John Dewey, it's our responsibility to lead students to genuine learning (Noddings, 2007, p.33). We need trained early childhood teachers who will ensure the reading, writing and arithmetic learning outcomes from age 3-8 years old.

Indeed, the K to 12 Program has proven to work around the world. Its origins could be traced back to a classic philosopher – Plato.

Plato believed that students should be educated according to their capacities – that they should not all have exactly the same education. Plato's plan provided for the special education of workers, of artisans, of guardians (soldiers), of rulers (the upper echelon of the guardian class). The first group was to be well trained in specific occupations so that, Plato says through Socrates, our shoes will be well made and our crops well tended. The second, identified by physical strength and spirit, was to receive an expert level of physical and moral training. Socrates described the noble auxiliary or guardian as well trained in philosophy, spirit, *swiftness*, and strength. Finally, potential rulers were to be educated with meticulous care in philosophy, mathematics, literature, and history and their education would continue well beyond their school years.

### **Fears and Loop holes in the K-12 system and its implementation**

Plato's model was "functionalist" – a model designed to produce competent adults to meet the needs of the state. Educators could work to produce people who are both self-actualized and useful to the state.

There are too many controversies and praises that hound this new law, however, many schools in the country have to buckle up to cope with the demands as they have already been competing globally even before the passage of the law. And in order to meet the global demands, the schools have to face the challenges that come with the K to 12 program implementation.

In a statement posted on its website, Anakbayan, a youth group, assails that the K to 12 program is “flawed, problematic framework” which will only worsen the education crisis and “will further subject the nation’s workers to exploitation.”

“The K-12, unlike what Aquino is promising, is not a solution to education and employment woes. Instead, it will further worsen and deepen the problems,” Vencer Crisostomo, national chairperson of Anakbayan, says of the newly signed law.

He says the additional years in the K to 12 program will mean additional burden to parents and students who at present are already struggling to finish the current cycle. “At present, only 14 out of 100 finish the education cycle up to college. Additional years will mean additional drop-outs,” he said. He also points out the lack of budget for education currently. “Government spending for education, as it is, is not enough to meet the shortages at present. The shortages will worsen and we will be faced with greater problems,” he says.

Crisostomo explains that tuition rates for tertiary education will further hike as the government’s K to 12 will also mean abandonment for tertiary education. “We will see more budget cuts for the State Universities and Colleges and commercialization of universities. The government is set to further abandon tertiary education.”

But the greater problem is the program’s “problematic and flawed neoliberal framework” for labor.

“The K to 12 aims to create cheaper, more ‘exploitable’ labor. The program ensures to make more ‘semi-skilled’ youths enter the labor force as early as 18 years old, which will make the unemployment problem worse. The net effect will be lower wages for workers,” he says. Crisostomo adds that “ultimately, this is an attack on labor and wages.”

“This program will further subject our youths to exploitation by foreign monopolies as cheap, slave labor.”

Teachers in both private and public schools have been going through series of trainings for grade 2 and grade 8 curricula.

Elena M. Borcillo, the City Schools Division Superintendent, says the series of trainings tackle the design of the curriculum, desired outcomes of Grades 1 to 10 program, medium of instruction, time allotment, sample class program, learning resources, assessment and rating of learning outcomes and culminating activities/performances based on the Universal education system pattern.

Borcillo explains that the teachers will not be left behind as they will undergo series of trainings until the first batch of K to 12 program will be completed. These trainings will be passed on to their subordinates until everyone gets to understand and employ the curricula properly.

The research of our student, Palatta, *Public Secondary Schools: An Inquiry on the Instructional Readiness and Management of Grade 7 Mathematics Curriculum*, published in the Arellano University Graduate School Journal (March 2013, p.81) concluded that the public secondary schools are not ready in terms of textbooks/instructional materials and content relative to the implementation of Grade 7 mathematics curriculum under K-12 program. Furthermore, the challenges, concerns and impediments encountered by the teachers were moderately serious.

Marissa Aban, a grade 2 teacher in Bagong Silang Elementary in Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte, welcomes the new K to12 program as very promising since it will equip the students with skills and knowledge even before they decide to get a college degree or immediately get a job after high school.

“This is a practical option for the students especially those who cannot pursue a college degree right away but could get a job and perhaps study at the same time,” Aban says.

However, Aban suggests that DepEd should also encourage the students to continue college else the country will end up with less college graduates in the future. She cites the cases in other countries where top positions are managed by import professionals and leaving the blue collar jobs to the citizens of that particular country.

For Antonia Balingkit of Alubijid elementary school in Misamis Oriental, the K to 12 is a revolutionary educational leap however, she worries that it might be just one of the failed programs of the country. Balingkit points out that need for teachers to be upgraded as well to cope with the demands of providing the best learning experience to their students.

Quennie Ilogon, a mother of two, worked doubly hard to help her husband financially so that her two children can study in a private school. Ilogon says her children deserves quality education that is why she settles them to a more expensive school rather than in public schools even if it costs her much since she is assured her children are getting the kind of education she wants for them.

Ronald Meinardus (2003) in *The Crisis of Public Education in the Philippines*, “With 95 per cent of all elementary students attending public schools, the educational crisis in the Philippines is basically a crisis of public education. The wealthy can easily send their offspring to private schools, many of which offer first-class education to the privileged class of pupils.”

Reportedly, at last count, more than 17 million students are enrolled in this country’s public schools.

At an annual growth rate of 2.3 per cent, some 1.7 million babies are born every year. In a short time, these individuals will claim their share of limited educational provisions.

“We can’t build classrooms fast enough to accommodate all these people,” said the DepEd Undersecretary, who also recalled the much lamented lack of teachers, furniture and teaching materials.

Furthermore, economic in nature, to save money, the agency once came up with a solution: the mass promotion of pupils in elementary school.

In an interview with the public school teachers who are our students at the Graduate School teachers were made to make beautiful lesson plans and perfect reports to satisfy school heads who in turn submit these to the higher authorities in the division, regional and central offices.

These reports were able to whitewash and hide the problem.

It takes many hours to produce a detailed lesson plan as well as make the necessary visual aids. Most of the time the teachers would sit down and write while letting the pupils copy the lessons on the board. They have no more time to explain the lessons to the pupils.

The integrity of the National Achievement Test has oftentimes been compromised. The results of the NAT determine the ranking of the schools and thus the amount of the performance bonus of teachers.

### **The Real Solution**

To go back to an outstanding leader, lawyer and teacher, Atty. Rene Saguisag: Henry Brooks Adams said a teacher affects eternity. We had very very good, dedicated teachers from pre-WW I, in Makati and Pasig. If we don't have similar teachers today, even K-20 may not work.

The Principal Rob Rauh of the Marva Collins Preparatory School during the orientation and training for teachers: Every child is expected to succeed, and teachers will be held accountable for making it happen. *Students don't fail, teachers do.*

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