

Understanding the K to 12 Educational Reform

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ABSTRACT

Republic Act No. 10533, the Enhanced Education Act of 2013, seeks to improve the basic education system of the Philippines by strengthening its curriculum and lengthening the number of years of basic education from ten to twelve years. The new curriculum, popularly known as the K to 12 program, is a landmark reform that brings the basic education of the country on a par with international standards. The history of the reform is revisited and its legal bases, main features, relevant orders, and implications for higher education are discussed. Concerns about its initial implementation are raised and a call for all stakeholders, particularly teachers who are the principal agents of instruction, is made to make the reform work for the benefit of Filipino learners.

Background of the Basic Education Reform

A landmark curricular reform in Philippine basic education is the K to 12 program – enshrined in RA 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The 10-year basic education program is extended by the addition of Grades 11-12 or Senior High School. Kindergarten is also implemented under the Department of Education in fulfillment of the “Universal Pre-schooling for All” earlier signed as RA 10157.

A necessary first step in any reform is understanding our situation (Gardner, 2011). RA 10533 is rooted in the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA 2006-2010) that sought to create a basic education that would enable the Philippines to attain the Education for All (EFA) objective by 2015. BESRA focused on policy actions within the following key reform thrusts (KRT):

KRT 1: Get all schools to continuously improve.

KRT 2: Enable teachers to further enhance their contribution to learning outcomes.

KRT 3: Increase social support for the attainment of desired learning outcomes.

KRT 4: Improve impact on outcomes from complementary early childhood education, alternative learning systems and private sector participation.

KRT 5: Change the institutional culture of DepEd to better support these key reform thrusts (DepEd Memorandum No. 370, s. 2005).

KRT 3 was researched on by a team from the College of Education, UP Diliman, headed by Ocampo (2006). The strategy paper started with the data from the 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) that indicated (1) 9.2 million Filipinos are not functionally literate and numerate and (2) less than 50% of the expected skill and content learning is mastered by students when they finish basic education. It also made use of the EDCOM Report (1991) which identified the use of English as the snag in student achievement and recommended the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction. The College of Education strategy paper proposed three language and literacy reforms to ensure better school performance among Filipino young learners. These are (1) implement

a developmentally and culturally sound programming of language and literacy development in schools, (2) create better learning environments to support language and literacy education of students, and (3) enliven critical social support structures in the community to support learners in school (Ocampo, 2006).

National Language and Literacy Reform No. 1 emphasized the use of the language spoken by the child at home, i.e., mother tongue or first language, as medium of instruction to enable the learners to be fully engaged in school activities, learning and thinking in the language they know best and getting a strong foundation to learn additional languages that include the national language (Filipino) and English.

Relevant to this, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2009, that institutionalized Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). This served as a precursor to RA 10533. The K to 12 program or 12-year basic education cycle includes the educational agenda of Universal Pre-schooling for All, Every Child a Reader by Grade 1 and alternative streams in senior high school.

Republic Act 10157 signed on 2013 January 20, otherwise known as The Kindergarten Education Act, seeks to equip children with readiness skills for Grade 1. Kindergarten is therefore now under the Department of Education *de jure*, by virtue of law. With the legal mandate, the government assumes the responsibility of providing preschool education to all Filipino children giving them the necessary exposure in preparation for the more formal nature of schooling by the first grade. Research has shown that children, who by the age of six have 9/10 of their brain physically developed, benefit from the right training in kindergarten.

From kindergarten to Grade 3, the medium of instruction in schools is the mother tongue of the children. The use of the first language seamlessly transitions children from home to school thus facilitating literacy and numeracy. Research findings conclusively indicate that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom results in better cognitive skills and facilitation of second language learning as language abilities that include literacy strategies and communication skills transfer from the first to the second language (Baker, 1996).

With the child's mother tongue as medium of instruction, the mandate is to have students read by Grade 1. The question is, in what language can a Filipino child learn to read faster? The question can be answered by examining the characteristics of a true alphabet as identified by Havelock. The first characteristic states that each alphabetic symbol must represent one sound. Filipino and other Philippine languages have transparent orthography. There is systematic mapping between orthography and phonology (Durgunoglu & Oney, 2000) aptly captured by the description "Kung ano ang tunog siyang sulat, kung ano ang sulat, siyang basa." English on the other hand has redundant letters like "c" and "k". For example, the letter "c" carries the sound /k/ as in *cake* and /s/ as in *city*. There are five English vowels but the sounds of these are more than double that number depending on the relative height and front-back position of the tongue and by (non-)rounding and whether they are long or short (McCully, 2009). The second characteristic of a true alphabet is that each of its sounds must be represented by one symbol. The /f/ sound has various representations: "f", "ph", and "gh" in English. The third characteristic is a true alphabet has 20-30 characters only. Filipino, other Philippine languages and English have this characteristic. One can draw the logical conclusion to answer the question posed earlier, especially considering that Filipino children are exposed to and use Filipino or another Philippine language at home.

From learning to read, the child reads to learn in the elementary level until Grade 6. Then he goes to high school to have the usual subjects in mathematics, science, social studies, Filipino, English and exploratory Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) in Grades 7-8 and specialized TLE in Grades 9-10. In Senior High School or Grades 11-12, there is the option to choose from among four tracks: (1) Academic Track (General Academic Strand; Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics or STEM; Accounting, Business and Management or ABM; Humanities, Music and Social Sciences or HUMSS); (2) Technical Vocational Livelihood (TVL) Track (Home Economics, Agri-Fishery, Industrial Arts, Information and Communication Technology or ICT); (3) Sports Track and (4) Arts and Design Track. The DepEd has done a great job of providing the curriculum guides that can be viewed or downloaded from <bit.ly/kto2curriculum>. The curriculum guides

specify the content standards (the “what “of learning) and performance standards (the “how”).

Three additional laws were passed relevant to the aforementioned tracks. The first is RA 10647 – the “Ladderized Education Act of 2014” signed on 21 November 2014. It seeks to strengthen the ladderized interface between technical-vocational education/training and higher education such that job platforms and opportunities to earn are available at every exit and credit transfers are ensured when the student decides to return to school. The second is RA 10648 – the “Iskolar ng Bayan Act of 2014” signed on 27 November 2014. The Act provides scholarship grants in State Colleges and Universities (SUCs) to top graduates of all public schools provided the students meet the admission requirements of the college/university they intend to enroll in. Finally, RA 10650 – the “Open Distance Learning Act” signed on 9 December 2014 seeks to expand access to educational services through open distance learning or the use of technology to enable students to develop competencies and earn a degree. It is clear that the government is providing the legal support to respond to the changing educational landscape and to ensure the success of our country’s educational reform.

With the additional two years in basic education, high school students are expected to be either work-ready or college-ready. Corollary to this, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued the College Readiness Standards, defined as consisting of “the condition of knowledge, skills and reflective thinking necessary to participate and succeed – *without remediation* – in entry-level undergraduate courses in Higher Education Institutions (CHED CEB Resolution 298-2011, 28 October 2011; italics mine). The College Readiness Standards (CRS) are attached as an appendix.

With the CRS, the practice of offering remedial or foundation subjects at the tertiary level will be discontinued. Subjects of this nature are brought down to the level of Senior High School. The General Education Curriculum in higher education will be more focused on collegiate level curricula and shall conform to international standards specified by UNESCO and other international accreditation bodies.

Discussion

The K to 12 program encompasses kindergarten, six (6) years of elementary education and six (6) years of high school education, the latter divided into four (4) years of junior high school and two (2) years of senior high school. The program aims to decongest and enhance the curriculum to enable learners to acquire the basic competencies needed by students to work, engage in entrepreneurship, or pursue higher education (www.gov.ph/k-12/, SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2012). Kindergarten starts at age five; thus, Filipino students who complete their basic education are deemed ready for further education or work by the legally employable age of eighteen. A 12-year basic education program is found to be the best period of learning and is likewise the globally recognized standard for students and professionals (DepEd, 2010).

Based on the EDCOM Report (1991) that identified English as the snag in student achievement, the K to 12 program likewise requires mother tongue or the home language of the child to be the medium of instruction (MOI) or language of instruction (LOI) from kindergarten until Grade 3. By Grade 4, the students are to transition to English as MOI. Although there are still issues and debates on early or late exit in the use of the mother tongue as MOI, the additional years of senior high school and the availability and quality of learning materials, the K to 12 program was progressively rolled out by DepEd in SY 2011-2012 starting with Grade 1 and Grade 7.

To support the roll-out and prepare teachers in the field for the implementation of the Program, DepEd sponsored the National Training of Trainers followed by the mass training of teachers using the Cascading Training model. This is the best available strategy considering budgetary constraints and the archipelagic characteristic of the country with teachers in many separate locations. One requirement of Cascading Training for it to be effective and functionally efficient is to have adequate time for comprehensive coverage of the training material (Elder, n.d.)

It is a given that the five-day training given by DepEd is dictated by limited resources, thus the need to maximize the benefit teachers can get from it. Teachers need to understand the rationale behind

the curricular reform and the concomitant learner-centered teaching along with formative and performance-based learning assessment. Unfortunately, much time during the past trainings was used on “management of learning” activities and preparation and practice for the “group yell” to build team spirit. Such are purportedly based on andragogy (critiqued by Smith, 2010) but fun in learning should not override depth of understanding.

One salient feature of the K to 12 program is integrated and seamless learning through the use of the spiral progression approach (www.gov.ph/k-12/). The limited, precious time in the training of teachers could have been utilized for a more comprehensive understanding of the mandated spiral progression approach in general and its application in science, mathematics, Araling Panlipunan (AP), MAPEH or music-arts-physical education-health, Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (Values Education) and the integrated language arts (Mother Tongue, Filipino, English). Why is there a shift from the previous discipline-based curriculum? As an approach, spiral progression may be axiomatic but applying it is a different matter. Teachers need to understand that the spiral progression approach entails revisiting (i.e., progression that involves growing understanding in breadth and depth) that creates a metaphorical spiral. In other words, as Bruner (1960/1977) espoused, progression is both vertical (increasing complexity) and horizontal (broader range of application). It is not just repetition of topics that can degenerate to redundancy and what Seely (in De Dios, 2013) described as a “curriculum that is a mile wide and an inch deep.” The curriculum framework of each subject area could also have been thoroughly discussed, not just presented as a figure or illustration, for understanding (*what* – the cognitive) and appreciation (*why* – the affective) for it to be accepted and embraced by teachers in the field. With understanding and appreciation, the defining factor would be resourcefulness, not resource (Robbins, 2006). In Bruner’s (1977) own words:

A curriculum is more for teachers than it is for pupils. If it cannot change, move, perturb, inform teachers, it will have no effect on those whom they teach. It must be first and foremost a curriculum for teachers. If it has any effect on pupils, it will have it by virtue of having had an effect on teachers.

Another requirement of the cascade model of training for it to be efficient and functionally effective is to ensure that the training materials are of excellent quality -- the content, language, and teaching aids are correct. Aside from training materials, new textbooks usually form part of a curriculum revision. Learning materials are an important component of the teaching-learning process. In our country where the majority of students may not have the benefit of modern technological devices, the textbook remains to be their major, if not the only, learning resource. Needless to say, the K to 12 textbooks should be of sterling quality. Two basic principles for quality textbooks are (1) concepts are correct and precise and (2) language is accurate and precise (Education Board-HK, 2014).

To be sure, DepEd has the necessary plan in textbook development that includes securing the services of writers and consultants involved in various layers of writing and correction – content, cultural sensitivity, language editing and proofreading (Yee, 2015). What is crucial is the implementation of the plan. What are the criteria and process in the vetting and final selection of writers? Experienced teachers can collaboratively develop textbooks but if the writers for different units/grading quarters did not have the opportunity to plan together and communicate with each other along the way either face-to-face or virtually, there can be serious problems. A related question is: How much time and support were the textbook writers given? Corollary to good, knowledgeable textbook writers, getting experienced educators and consultants from universities and special institutes can arguably ensure quality. However, professional ethics dictate that before their names are cited in the learning materials, the corrected and revised drafts should have been returned to them for verification. Then conceptual, procedural, and language errors could have been addressed before printing to avoid errors that are embarrassing and even potentially damaging. The following were found in the Grade 10 English textbook entitled *Celebrating Multiculturalism Through World Literature* (note the error even in the title) in preparation for the mass training of some teachers in Metro Manila held at the UP College of Education in May, 2015:

Activity Name (Page)	Comments
Task 4 “I Think” (p. 9)	It should be “prompts” not “questions.”
Task 5.3 Anticipation–Reaction Guide (p. 11)	The anticipation–reaction guide is not appropriate for a literary text. It cannot correct misconceptions on ideas because the activity in the textbook is about the details of the literary piece.
Task 6 Vocabulary Spinner (p. 12)	The vocabulary spinner seems not suitable to the age of Grade 10 students.
Tasks 8–12 (pp. 16–17)	More inferential questions should be asked to develop the higher-order thinking skills of students. Many of the questions are low-level questions (literal questions).
Task 16 Grammarian for a Day (pp. 18–19)	The activities are too form-focused. The activities should move from form-focused tasks to functional ones. The students should produce pieces of discourse using the grammatical forms.
Task 20 Design (p. 21); Task 23 Stress Tabs 22)	The items should observe parallelism.
Task 27 The Great Eight (pp. 25–26)	The idea of using multiple intelligences (MI) as basis for designing activities is good. However, the activities in this part are forced. MI activities should be natural. No instructions were given.
The Anti-Bullying Act of 2013	We don’t know if this is related to the previous tasks or even to the theme.
General Comments on Lesson 1	There is not much integration in this lesson. The grammar lesson should be modified and improved by making students understand the function of forms in discourse. There are also many shifts in topics.
Task 7 Guide for Reading (p. 36)	An anticipation–reaction guide cannot be used for a literary piece. It’s meant to correct misconceptions on topics not on details of a story.
Question on page 36 before the text	Is this a motive question? If yes, it’s not a good one. A motive question should be a question that can be answered by reading a text. It’s meant to give the students purpose for reading the text.
Task 9 Dissecting the Text (p. 42)	The number of inferential questions should be increased. Some critical questions should also be added.
Task 10 Visualizing the Text (p. 42)	For the instructions for Group 2, is it possible to compare the characteristics of Perseus and Medusa? Think of a better task.
Task 14 Triple Treat (pp. 45–46)	The language tasks are very form-focused. These activities should be replaced with more functional ones.
Question before the text on page 55	If this is a motive question, it should be replaced. The question should be answerable by reading the text.

Task 8 Piece of Pi	Before showing the movie, students should be given a motive question, so they have a purpose as they watch the movie.
Task 14 Ad Typecast (p. 65)	Don't the students need some background on sexism before they can answer the processing questions?
Task 16 Past Forward	Instead of saying research on a group or a person who has made other people self-reliant, the task should specify the people or group the students will research on. Some that can be used are "Gawad Kalinga," "Go Negosyo," and "Kariton Klasrum."
Your Journey (p. 67)	The enduring question is missing.
Your Text (p. 69)	How is this text related to the theme? Why do some texts have introductory parts while others don't?
Task 5 SGDA (pp. 71-74)	The differentiated tasks are very uneven. The authors might want to explore a literary circle activity or a quiz bee. The task of unlocking difficult words should be done before reading the text.
Task 6 Language Watch (p. 73)	Among the choices in activity A, there is not any conjunction. Also, have parenthetical expressions already been introduced?
Task 7 (SGDA)	The differentiated activities seem to be forced. They don't form a natural connection with each other and with the other parts of the lesson. What's the point of the task for Group 1?
Task 8 For A VIP	VIP (very impressive photo), as used in this task, is not a universally recognized initialism. We should be careful not to inadvertently misinform students. How can the important things in one's life be based on fact/opinion? This seems not natural.
C. Unlimited (p. 76)	The samples are missing. The instructions are very long and confusing. What's the relationship among the three sub-tasks? Can they be simplified?
Your Journey (p. 79)	Where is the meaningful/enduring question?
Group Activities from page 84 to 86	The level of difficulty of these tasks should be reviewed.
Task 6 Language Line (p. 87)	The lesson on auxiliary verbs in the text box is very simplistic and it might mislead students in their use of these forms.
Your Journey (p. 92)	The construction of the paragraph should be improved. Where's the enduring question?
Task 3 Three in Control (p. 94)	Is there really a need for this? Can this be deleted?
Your Text (p. 94)	Where is the introductory paragraph to the text?

From “The Analects” (pp. 95-96)	The text should be processed first before the SGDA.
Group 1 Meaningful Search (p. 96)	Since this serves as the unlocking part, it should be before the text. The connotative meaning of “disgrace” given is also a denotative meaning.
Group 5 Taking Challenges as Opportunities (p. 99)	What’s the purpose of the table at the end of the activity?
C. Using Modals (p. 101)	The discussion on modals is very simple. It should be appropriate to the grade level.
Group 1 In Another Dimension (p. 102)	Since we would like students to use grammar forms at the discourse level, we should not explicitly tell them to use a particular form every time there is an activity. A good prompt should already make them use the form even without explicit instructions to do so.
Pre-test (p. 112)	The instructions for items 25-27 are unclear. What will the students write?
Thinking about the Text (p. 129)	The word “canto” should be unlocked.
Your Text (pp. 152-156)	Is the source of the story reliable considering that it’s a blog?
Task 2 Mind Your Word (p. 165)	Hasn’t this activity been used in a previous lesson?
Discussion Points (p. 185)	Question 4 should be: “In which fields is APA dominantly used? How about MLA?”
Remember! (p. 259)	Some sources treat argumentation and persuasion as different.
Trash Can Thesaurus (p. 279)	The instructions might give the impression that some words ought to be forgotten and not used.
Task 7 Language in Use (p. 287)	The exercises on form in this task do not show how the grammatical concept can help in the making of the final task.
Task 8 SGDA (pp. 289-291)	The level of difficulty among the different tasks should be reviewed.
Missions 1 to 5 (p. 308)	What’s the relationship between the search for pronouns and the outputs?
Task 12 “A Roast for Tarzan” (p. 331)	The introduction of the roast speech should be reconsidered, or the concept of “face” by Brown and Levinson can be introduced here considering the nature of a roast speech.
Task 13: Heal the World (p. 333)	Remove the explicit instructions on the use of pronouns. The use of the grammatical form should come naturally through the phrasing of the prompt.

Task 10 On Writing a Bibliography (p. 345)	The discussion of the structures of modification is very technical and structural. This is contradictory to the avowed functional orientation of the text.
Task 11 Let's Rekindle the Past (p. 348)	This is a very structural activity. Make this more functional.
Local Treasures	Where is the rubric?
Magic Square (p. 423)	The choices should be alphabetized.
Hedge of Glory (p. 434)	The sentences should be connected with one another.
Your Text (p. 460)	Where is the motive question?
Task 6 Make a Match! (p. 466)	The choices should be alphabetized.

Other Comments:

- There are many mistakes in grammar and mechanics , and these should be corrected.
- The citation of the sources should follow the APA format to expose the students to the system that they will learn in the succeeding grading periods.
- The lessons are uneven in terms of parts. Some parts are present in others while these are not in the other lessons. For example, some have motive questions before texts while others don't.
- SGDA should be done in all quarters and not be concentrated only in one grading. It should be a consistent, perennial feature of the lessons the whole year.
- Some sources used in the textbook are questionable.
- The texts should have a motive question before each of them.

The right choice of writers and systematic procedure in textbook development can ensure that the taxpayers' money is well-spent and more importantly, that learning materials will result in academic gains to prepare basic education graduates either for the world of work or higher education in a knowledge-based society.

Conclusion

The Philippines as a country needs better education as it is probably the most crucial parameter of development (Hugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010). The government has laid down the laws that will improve basic education but our country needs more support from other stakeholders like business and industry, parents, administrators and teachers themselves who are tasked to implement

the K to 12 program. If we are to elevate the notion of excellence in teaching, the K to 12 program needs dedicated teachers who upgrade their competencies through continuous learning and professional development. The mass training of teachers done by DepEd every summer as it gradually rolls out the K to 12 program by grade level is definitely not enough. Teachers can only create upward spirals of performance in Filipino learners if, paraphrasing Dana Cotton (1967), having dared to teach, they don't cease to learn. Then they can critically evaluate and correct the seemingly rushed production of learning materials in terms of both typographical and conceptual errors. The K to 12 program is envisioned to give the country quality education but quality education necessitates coherence from intention to implementation.

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Appendix

COLLEGE READINESS STANDARDS GOALS

Overall, college readiness standards expect K-12 education to connect the individual student with local, national and global communities, concerns, and challenges. Concretely, K-to-12 graduates should be able to:

1. Produce all forms of texts (e.g., written, oral, visual, digital) based on:
 - Solid grounding on Philippine experience and culture;
 - An understanding of the self, community, and nation;
 - Application of critical and creative thinking and doing processes;
 - Competency in formulating ideas/arguments logically, scientifically, and creatively; and
 - Clear appreciation of one's responsibility as a citizen of a multicultural Philippines and a diverse world.
2. Systematically apply knowledge, understanding, theory, and skills for the development of the self, local, and global communities using prior learning, inquiry, and experimentation;
3. Work comfortably with relevant technologies and develop adaptations and innovations for significant use in local and global communities;
4. Communicate with local and global communities with proficiency, orally, in writing, and through new technologies of communication; and
5. Interact meaningfully in a social setting and contribute to the fulfillment of individual and shared goals, respecting the fundamental humanity of all persons and the diversity of groups and communities.

The specific goals are framed within the subject areas and were approved by CHED in 2011.