

Executive Summary

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The policy context

Education is undergoing far-reaching changes in the Philippines. The Education for All program not only extends the length of basic education, it also introduces significant changes in what children are taught, what they learn in school, and how learning is organized and described. The goals of 21st century skills for all students are to develop the potential of every Filipino child, as well as meeting the needs of the society and economy to strengthen the nation's position in the globalized world of the 21st century (SEAMEO-Innotech 2012).

The intended curriculum

The new K to 12 Curriculum (ibid.) identifies what is *intended* learning for children in schools across the country and how this learning will take place. It stipulates a more integrated approach to learning, where students learn to apply and use the knowledge and understanding they develop about the subjects they study. It aspires to integrate the 21st century learning skills in information technology and media, effective communication, life and career skills, and learning and innovation skills. These skills will lead students into their chosen pathways of productive employment and life in the workforce, higher education, or in entrepreneurial activities. The focus on the development of learning competencies enables the mapping of the progress and development of children as they move through the different levels of the school.

The big innovations of the K to 12 Curriculum are the development of understanding through learning, and introduction of integrated sequences of learning both within subjects and across cognate subjects. The Education for All reform also includes significant changes for the practice of education across the country. The introduction of the senior high school and kindergarten years and the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education policy will have significant impact on practice of education, and have immense implications for interpretation of the curriculum and for its teaching.

These reforms will take many years to implement in full, and from each year of implementation will come lessons to apply to the future years. In order to elicit

evidence of best practice across the major reforms, ACTRC will formally research implementation relating to the language of instruction, alignment of curriculum, and sequence of learning.

Language of instruction

The development of a sound foundation for literacy and learning in the early years equips students for deeper learning and the development of skills in following years. There is a strong research base that indicates that children learn better in the early years of schooling when they learn through their mother tongue compared to when they learn through a second language (Benson, 2004; Kosonan & Young, 2009). The nature and length of mother tongue and bilingual education programs are often contentious issues. The way that programs are implemented influence the extent to which the desired outcomes are achieved. We cannot take implementation at face value. "Things are not always 'as they seem', and we must look more deeply than explicit policy to understand how policy works in practice" (Schiffman 2006, p. 120). In the rich linguistic environment of the Philippines, the ways in which mother tongue and official languages (Filipino and English) are learned and used in schooling need to be observed and documented in order for facilitating factors to be identified.

Curriculum alignment

Teaching-learning materials are based on the *intended curriculum* to provide the foundation for delivery of the *implemented curriculum*, which students experience at school (Houang & Schmidt, 2008). The *intended curriculum* is essentially the vision of its architects, and is reflected in its formal documentation. The degree to which this documentation is clear and specific, in the context of its goals and values, has direct implications for its interpretation by teachers and text writers, and therefore ultimately for its chance of success. The *implemented curriculum* - what actually happens in the classroom - will vary across classes and schools. The degree to which it will vary beyond the reasonable individual differences in teaching style will have immediate implications for the opportunities for students to learn. This includes the input provided to students in their subjects, and the learning activities in

which they participate. The *achieved curriculum* is reflected through student outcomes, what they have learnt, can understand, and are able to apply. The alignment between these three views of curriculum is particularly tenuous during periods of major change or where high stakes assessment is involved (Sherin & Drake, 2009; Hume & Coll, 2010). Through scrutiny of these alignments, the system can be informed through feedback loops concerning particular strategies or enabling conditions.

Sequence of learning

In aiming for holistic development of learners, the K to 12 Curriculum integrates many dimensions of learning. These go well beyond knowledge and understanding to higher order cognitive skills such as analysis and evaluation, as well as a range of skills and attitudes related to the subjects studied. As students move through school, the nature and extent of these elements becomes more complex. An obvious example of curricular reform based on the valuing of sequence of learning lies in the sciences curriculum. Several disciplines of science have been integrated in the intended secondary school curriculum, and it is noteworthy that this curriculum also provides the foundation for understanding the modern technological world. This curriculum integration has implications for assessment and for pedagogy, as assessment needs to gather reliable data about the intended learning outcomes in ways that are valid, and reflect their significance in the intended curriculum. Teachers need to develop skills in effectively integrating several dimensions of learning in ways that the intended outcomes of learning are achieved.

A research agenda

The delivery of education is a complex task and requires a high level of understanding and skill by teachers to ensure the intended learning. Studies of the implementation of curriculum frameworks in other parts of the world illustrate how teachers can respond differently to new ways of thinking and talking about teaching and learning (Sherin & Drake, 2009). As the K to 12 curriculum and associated innovations such as the MTB-MLE are implemented, it is essential that emerging best practices are explored in order to obtain a deeper understanding of how the delivery of the curriculum can be enhanced.

These are areas where ACTRC curriculum research activities will contribute to a deeper understanding of effective practices that can be shared with stakeholders, to enhance the quality of learning for all students in Filipino schools.

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