

Chronicling decentralization initiatives in the Philippine basic education sector

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Abstract

The Philippine school system is considered as one of the largest in the world with 41,989 public elementary and secondary schools and 7790 private schools under the supervision and regulation of the Department of Education (DepEd Fact Sheet, 2005). This paper chronicles various decentralization initiatives carried out by the basic education sector in the country specifically along the areas of education financing, teacher effectiveness, curriculum development, textbooks and instructional materials, and school–community dynamics and student learning and assessment. This discourse culminates with the discussion of the lessons learned from a decentralized system of education for better school operation and management.

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Decentralization and modernization are the cornerstones on which we hope to establish a new policy environment for educational excellence. But we must do the right things in the right way.

(Ricardo Gloria, 1996), Former Education Secretary

1. Introduction

The year 2001 marked the centennial of Philippine public education, the 100 years of direct contact of which with the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese, have given rise to a spectrum of

educational variations, lines of emphasis and issues. Its transformation as a system of education calls for synoptic interpretation, which, according to Greene (in [Hornedo, 1995](#)) explains the meaning of patterns which become apparent only when obvious facts are placed alongside each other so they can visibly seen together. Further, isolated facts tend to make no sense by themselves, but assume significance only when perceived in relation to other facts. Synoptic interpretation, one of the basic human capabilities, is rooted in the assumption of the relativity of meaning, and on the further assumption that the greater the number of facts seen together, the more reliable the interpretation.

Systems of education around the world, particularly those of developing and underdeveloped countries, are beset with restraining and daunting

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trends and problems which according to the [World Declaration on Education For All and Framework for Action to meet Basic Learning Needs \(1990\)](#) include mounting debt burdens, the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among and within nations, war, occupation, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children and widespread environmental degradation. With such trends, the basic learning needs of school children have become the pivotal point for institutions of learning to identify possibilities of how power and authority can be appropriately shared for purposes of facilitating self-management and improved decision making. As early as the 1980s, several major shifts, collectively known as megatrends ([Naisbitt, 1982](#), and [Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990](#)) have been adopted to identify directions toward which education is moving. One of these shifts is characterized by change from *centralization to decentralization*. [Naisbitt \(1997\)](#) posited that the bigger the system, the more efficient must be the parts in order to function as a successful system and the more autonomous must be the parts (22). It is interesting to note that in most developing countries, the central government has the responsibility for providing basic education. Since the management of the basic education sector demands

managerial, technical and financial capacity of government, a growing number of countries worldwide are transferring this responsibility away from the center ([King and Guerra, n.d.](#)).

The centrality of and the need to reconcile decision making with responsibility and accountability has given rise to site-based management. Given several nomenclatures in literature, school or site-based management, as a revolutionary educational construct, has been described as the centerpiece for school restructuring ([Caldwell and Spinks, 1992](#); [Townsend, 1997](#)) with a view to improving student outcomes and school effectiveness ([Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2004](#); [Briggs and Wohlstetter, 2003](#); [Cheng and Chan, 2000](#)) and ensuring better school quality ([Caldwell, 1990](#); [Robertson and Briggs, 1998](#); [Cheng and Chan, 2000](#)).

The Philippine school system is considered as one of the largest in the world. The most recent basic education statistics released by the [Department of Education and Culture and Sports \(2005\)](#) (Fact Sheet, 2005) indicates the increase in the number of schools, students and teachers in the country (see [Table 1](#)) over the last 6 years.

The growing statistical profile of the component aspect of the system invites the need to look closely on how management of such a large system is carried out via the adoption of a decentralized

Table 1
Philippine basic education statistics (1998–2004)

Elementary	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2002–2003	2003–2004
Schools	39,071	39,519	40,262	40,763	41,267	41,688
Public	35,587	35,848	36,069	36,234	36,738	37,159
Private	3484	3671	4193	4529	4529	4529
Enrolment	12,502,524	12,707,788	12,760,243	12,826,218	12,962,745	12,982,349
Public	11,562,181	11,786,622	11,837,582	11,916,686	12,048,720	12,061,675
Private	940,343	921,166	922,661	909,532	914,025	920,674
Teachers ^a	359,964	359,798	364,010	331,448	337,082	337,597
Public	329,198	329,198	331,827	331,448	337,082	337,597
Private	30,766	30,600	32,183	^b	^b	^b
Secondary						
Schools	7017	7197	7503	7683	7893	8091
Public	4116	4214	4335	4422	4632	4830
Private	2901	2983	3168	3261	3261	3261
Enrolment	5,115,251	5,207,446	5,401,867	5,813,879	6,032,440	6,270,208
Public	3,767,159	3,933,201	4,156,185	4,562,317	4,791,069	5,025,956
Private	1,348,092	1,272,236	1,245,682	1,251,562	1,241,371	1,244,252
Teachers ^a	145,977	145,561	147,728	112,201	119,235	120,685
Public	107,706	107,706	109,845	112,210	119,235	120,685
Private	38,271	37,855	37,883	^b	^b	^b

^aNot including laboratory schools of State Universities and Colleges (SUCs).

^bNo data available (Source: Fact Sheet, 2005).

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