

Dissecting K to 12: Why it is Necessary for the Philippines

For the Philippines to achieve first world status, it has to first improve its human capital. I am not necessarily accusing our country as full of unskilled and uneducated bums, but just look at these 2011 statistics: we rank 52nd in technology, 55th in human capital and 54th in overall creativity out of 75 countries (Martin Prosperity Institute 32-41); we also rank 117th in institutions, 113th in labor market efficiency, 110th in quality of primary education and 115th in quality of math and science education out of 142 countries (World Economic Forum 294-295).

The importance of human capital must not be downplayed. It determines what kinds of jobs a country's residents can do, and how well they can do those jobs to produce appreciable economic output (Hache 55). For decades, economists have already established that human capital, together with technological advancement, is what dictates a country's economic growth the most (Sachs 168). Corollary to this is that a country needs educated and globally competent individuals for its economy to improve. Fortunately, the Philippine government realized this too, and made a strategic response to this need by transitioning from its old ten-year basic education cycle to the K to 12 program.

The K to 12 Basic Education Program (to be shortened as K-12 in this article) is being implemented this year as a response to the need of the country to produce globally competent individuals. The flaws of the old ten-year basic education cycle were likened by President Noynoy Aquino to forced feeding. In the old system, students were forced to learn a lot of lessons by rote memorization, cramming a twelve-year curriculum in ten years (Avendaño). Like

forced feeding, they are fed too much than what they can take in, and throw up. Students do not get the chance to appreciate what is taught to them. A lot detest schooling and eventually drop out. DepEd revealed that 5.6 million students in the country, with age between six and fifteen, have dropped out or have never gone to school before (Chavez).

I can attest that two additional years will make a difference. I have lived my high school life going through various hardships in the form of laboratory reports, scientific research paper requirements, boring yet lengthy Filipino and History readings, dishearteningly difficult math quizzes and science lessons referencing from college-level textbooks. For me who went through all of that, I can really say that two additional years could have made my high school life easier and more enjoyable. I am sure that many others in my batch or those before me also think that way. So when I heard about the K-12, I immediately agreed with it. At that time I still did not know that the K-12 was so much more than adding two years to the basic education cycle.

DepEd highlights the following features of K-12 and elaborates them in the official government website: Universal Kindergarten; contextualization and enhancement of the curriculum; implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and Spiral Approach in the teaching strategy; and the addition of Senior High School (SHS).

The Universal Kindergarten seeks to prepare every Filipino child reaching 5 years of age for formal education. According to DepEd, research has shown that children who underwent kindergarten have a better probability of completing basic education than those who did not. By being compulsory and free, parents will have no reason to deprive their children of early childhood education.

The MTB-MLE is to be implemented from Kindergarten to Grade 3, and it is the use of the pupils' mother tongue in the mode of instruction. By using their mother tongue, the young pupils, still new to schooling, will be more comfortable in learning the lessons and thus will retain those lessons better. The MTB-MLE, along with the Universal Kindergarten, will give the pupils enough cushion for them to become accustomed to the academic learning environment, preparing them for the more difficult years ahead.

From now on, the curriculum will become contextualized to make it relevant to the pupils. Word problems, examples, activities, stories, poems, illustrations and such will be based on local culture and history. This makes the curriculum more familiar and easier for the pupils to understand. This will also enable the government to develop nationalism and increase awareness of the students to relevant national issues.

The curriculum will be restructured applying the Spiral Approach. It starts by teaching only basic concepts for all subjects then slowly progressing through grade levels by connecting new lessons from previous lessons, building up to the most complicated concepts. This promotes mastery since the students have to recall past lessons and apply them to new ones. Along with the contextualization of the curriculum, the Spiral Approach will promote critical thinking, since the students are not relying solely on memorization anymore; they are taught to understand the lessons wholly and apply them independently.

Compare the Spiral Approach to the presently applied Thematic Approach, taking the following specific example: in the present curriculum, Biology is taught in 2nd Year High School, Chemistry in 3rd Year and Physics in 4th year; while in the K-12 curriculum, all of these subjects

will be taught from Grade 7 to 10. The advantage is that every year the students learn something new about all three fields of science, continuously recalling old lessons and connecting them to new lessons. In the Thematic Approach, students learn one field of science intensively one year, and then the next year they can forget all about it. Though at present we still do not know if it will prove effective, the Spiral Approach seems promising enough.

The SHS is the selling point of K-12. The government website elaborates on it. These last two years will be the specialization period in the basic education cycle, where students may choose a career track based on skill assessment, interest and school capacity. These career tracks will determine the subjects that the students will take, either under the Core Curriculum or specific Career Pathways. The Core Curriculum consists of six subjects: Humanities, Language (English and/or Filipino), Math, Philosophy, Science and Social Sciences. Some content from the General Education subjects in university curriculums are embedded in these subjects.

The following five Career Pathways can be chosen: Business and Entrepreneurship; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science, Technology, and Engineering; Sports; and Technical-Vocational. They may take on-the-job training to obtain relevant first-hand experience which will prepare them for their chosen track. The SHS is a way to give the students freedom to choose the careers that they want, and actually help them prepare to pursue their dreams. This is already reason enough for students like me who graduated this year to become extremely jealous.

Overall, the K to 12 Basic Education is really promising, and I bet most people will be convinced in favor of it once they discover the features that come with it. Hopefully the K-12 would result to more brilliant graduates having high career potentials, who will contribute to the Philippines' economy.

However, there are various objections to the implementation of K-12. A number of local government officials underscore the lack of preparation and resources of public schools nationwide as the reason that K-12 will fail (Roque). The Manila Public School Teachers Association censured the DepEd for implementing the K-12 before addressing the five resource shortages plaguing the Philippine education system: classrooms, chairs/desks, teachers, toilets and textbooks (Alia). For them, the K-12 is just a burden, as what the government should first do is close these five gaps before attempting to implement K-12.

On the contrary, I don't see this as an immediate problem. It is only by 2017 when the full demand of all thirteen levels of education (Kindergarten up to Grade 12) will be faced, five years from now. DepEd Secretary Armin Luistro stated that DepEd is continuously addressing the five resource shortages, in fact closing the gap on two, textbooks and chairs (Sabater). DepEd was able to achieve a 1:1 ratio for students to textbooks while over a million school chairs were procured, enough to cover the needs of public schools for this school year.

One of the five resource shortages is the teachers. Aside from the fact that we lack good teachers, we also lack teachers who can teach the K-12 curriculum. The new curriculum is radically different from the present curriculum. If teachers who are already bad at teaching attempt to teach a new curriculum, the result will probably be worse than them teaching what they used to teach. Thus, without qualified teachers who can teach it properly, the K-12 will most likely fail. However, Secretary Armin Luistro gave a short term guarantee, stating that 140,000 teachers were trained this summer for the K to 12 Program (Martin). Of course, DepEd will continue on training more teachers for the new basic education system in the future.

The government has enough time to prepare and close all these five gaps. The K-12 is one of P-Noy's priorities in his Presidency, and he is expected to put it high up in his agenda. The budget for DepEd is continuously increasing by large margins. Last year the budget was P207 billion, and it increased by 15% this year to P238.8 billion. Next year, the budget will increase by 23% to P293 billion. These resources should ensure good implementation of K-12.

At the microeconomic level, the parents will be the most burdened by the implementation of the K-12. They will have to finance an additional two years of education for their children, which includes meal allowances, school supplies and transportation. Also, for the families which need their children to work immediately, their plans will have to be delayed for an additional two years.

However, the benefits far outweigh the costs. Students who go through SHS can choose to take the technical-vocation career pathway, which teaches them skills that can be used for work. TESDA promises to issue licenses to the students who take this career path, and offer them further training after graduation. The additional two years of expenses are worth it, considering that the graduates are immediately work-ready, not to mention, legally mature. With the licenses, they can take on better jobs. Thus they will have higher earning potential, which will generate returns for more than two years.

As for parents who plan to send their children to college, they too may consider the additional two years as beneficial instead of burdensome. The science and math curriculum will be strengthened in those last two years. Also, CHED will be transferring some of its General

Education subjects to the Core Curriculum of SHS. Thus, those students who opt to take the more academics-oriented subjects in SHS will be more prepared for college.

For the K-12 to be successful, the government will still have to hurdle some small problems that will eventually become apparent as it gets implemented gradually. One of these is the two-year absence of freshmen students in universities on 2016 to 2018 due to the insertion of SHS between Grade 10 and college. Another is the possibility that the enrolment in private schools will significantly decrease, due to the additional tuition expenses of Grades 11 and 12 that might force some parents to transfer their children to the free public schools.

Lastly, I think the capability of the teachers will be a deciding factor for the success of the K-12. We need teachers who inspire their students to become enthusiastic in their studies, especially in the earlier levels of education. Surely, these kinds of teachers will help lower the dropout rates. An inspired and enthusiastic child will do anything to stay in school and learn.

All in all, the K to 12 Basic Education Program seems very promising, with the Spiral Approach, MTB-MLE and the Senior High School. We only have to do well in implementing it and provide it with the necessary resources continuously in the long run. Success of the K to 12 should result in better human capital and soon enough our country will be among the best in the world. #

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Dear Readers,

My English 10 journey is finally ending. I have completed all of the course requirements, and I have learned so much, and I feel so grateful that I can't express it enough with words. The most important thing in this course is that I have finally reconciled with the Philippines, hahaha that means I now believe in it. I have to say thank you. Ma'am Florianne, thank you po talaga sa lahat! Mamimiss ko po yung mga moments sa klase na mapapa-silent ang class when you ask a deep question. Haha! :D

Okay, now about my position paper. I really like this paper, I especially tailored it to be like a combination of my past two papers. I wanted to make this paper in the first person view, and make it have a bit of a personal intimate feel, just like my Reaction Paper. I badly wanted to insert a few more personal experiences to make some good appeals to pathos. Hopefully I restrained myself enough, since I know that I have to maintain objectivity in the paper. The 2000 word limit, which was choking me, is another reason. Oh, by the way, I really was unable to conform to the 2000 word limit. If you can see, I indicated that my word count reached 2015. I could not find a way to shorten it anymore. When I was looking for something to delete, I would highlight something, let my pinky finger hover over the delete button, but then I would cringe and look for something else. It was hard. It took me two days. Haha.

I also used material from my concept paper here in this position paper. I really made a point that human capital is important, and that what better way to raise our human capital than improving the education system? I think I now understand what the objective of that concept paper was. While writing it, I was unsure. Now I know that it was to give readers background on why we need a better education system: by making references to economics concepts. I broke down everything there. So if a reader does not agree with me in this position paper that improving the education system would improve our economy, I would tell him: "Shut up a-hole. Why don't you read my concept paper?" HAHA!

What else do I have to say? Uhm, I did a lot of internet research for this paper. Hell, it was late into my third draft when I discovered the government website and was able to use it. That website elaborated everything on K-12! It practically transformed the whole structure of my paper from second to third draft, since by then I had the ultimate source reference. I'm now saying I plagiarized. My arguments are all thought up by me only, and I could apply for a copyright on them. Haha. Still, I have to admit I borrowed some ideas from that website... ☹

One last thing you should know before we end off all things about Eng 10 is that I kind of cheated. Well, maybe it's not really cheating, but still. I had an unfair advantage. All the while I was continuously asking advice from my dad. He's a lawyer, but he's also a very experienced writer. So we always communicated through email, so that he could help me on my paper. He was the one who advised some useful online references to me and checked my paper, especially on the sentence structure, paragraph-structure and flow of ideas. He's the reason I had up to four or five drafts for all of my Eng 10 papers.

Well, that's everything that I wanna say, other than I hope I get a 1.5 in English 10. :3 Thank you again for a fun-filled learning experience in English 10! ☺

-Lean

A Consequence of Inequality

Inequality has never been presented as stark and apparent as what has been shown in the BBC documentary entitled, “Toughest Place to be a Bus Driver.” It takes the viewer through a ten day journey of Josh West, a bus driver from London, who learns to drive a jeepney through the complicated Metro Manila traffic. In the documentary, the comparison between a European and Filipino with basically the same occupation reveals the first world-third world inequality. The documentary on various occasions emphasizes the cruelty done by the inequality in society. Rogelio Castro, the jeepney driver who hosts Josh and teaches him, even provides insight on the inequality with his words, “I put everything into my work; all of my strength goes into my work. But no matter how hard I try my life just doesn’t get any better. I’m stuck.”

Josh and Rogelio have the same occupation, providing public transportation. Both have essential roles in the normal functioning of their respective cities. But Josh earns in an hour with much less effort what Rogelio earns doing a physically and mentally demanding job for 12 hours.

The disparity in wage has a cruel consequence on the disadvantaged side. Rogelio’s family depends on his work day-to-day and with no social insurance for worst case scenarios such as when he can’t work due to sickness. His children and grandchildren cannot have proper education and his children who have already their own children are jobless and are dependent on him. His wife can’t even buy the medicine she needs and she already suffered a stroke three times. However Josh lives a stress-free happy life. He drives a

state-of-the-art double decker bus with accompanying maintenance and performance equipment. He has a big family enjoying the things Filipinos with at least Rogelio's financial problems would consider as luxuries.

The essential and heartbreaking inequality between a European bus driver and a Filipino jeepney driver proves that there is something wrong with how the Philippine government works. It is the government which must make a move to address this issue. The documentary already presented examples of where the government has to improve, such as: better health facilities and services; free contraception or population control; decentralization of hotspots of activity in metro manila to lessen traffic; and social insurance for everyone including those with low-income jobs such as jeepney drivers.

However, Rogelio is wrong when he says that he is stuck. Just being alive and being able to breathe air means there is hope. There are a few things he can do to improve his present situation. His jobless children should employ consistent and efficient methods to produce income. Or he and his family may go back to the province and find a living there. Even though the standard of living is still low, they do not have to face the daily horrors of a mega city. Anyway, Rogelio is receiving money from Josh to give his grandchildren good education. This will surely improve their lives. Education improves lives.

Dear Readers,

I myself enjoyed the rigorous thinking process this paper required from me. I had to write four drafts, and I experimented with various thesis statements pondering on which would be most easily justified by facts and such. Also, I was stuck on going broad, or going specific. But then I resorted to the one which truly reflected my reaction to the documentary.

The documentary really was a tad heartbreaking for me, the fact that Rogelio could not do anything to get out of the pit. But yes, I believe that there is something he can do. The intelligent always wins over the brawny. Rogelio should cook up techniques. (yes, mehehehe I don't care if those techniques are "honorable" everybody cheats in this cruel reality)

Anyway, the video just increases my frustration towards the Philippines. Yes, I am very outspoken, and I never try to hide the fact that I view my mother country as suckish and pathetic. Perhaps I am too brainwashed by the American Dream, I don't know. But I want a better life. Definitely not the Filipino life.

Going back to how I wrote this reaction paper, let me tell you first that it took me four days. I wrote some, rested, then on the next day went back to my paper only to realize that my thesis statement was ridiculous. So I took two days to think of good thesis statements, while juggling extracurricular activities and two exams. On the fourth day I did finish it. Yay!

PS: I asked permission from the instructor to exceed 500 words, but it was my first draft yet so the request was premature. I managed to not exceed 500 words. Yey for me again :D

Sincerely,

Lean

Food That I Crave the Most

Sniff. I am a big food maniac. There are so many foods that I just can't resist eating. One sniff or one glimpse of them makes me very hungry or even induces my salivary glands to go on overdrive. The layer of adipose tissue sticking out of my torso, a consequence which is frustratingly difficult to conceal, testifies to that fact. And the most frequent reason for my virtually monthly end-of-month financial struggles is my uncontrollable urge to spend on delicious food, regardless of the price or quantity.

Usually one of the easiest questions to answer is, "What is your favorite food?" But for me, it actually is something that has no answer. Whenever someone asks me that, I'll just get vexed and settle on an answer which I will not stick to in the future. My cravings are totally random. One day, I'll go to the convenience store and buy six packs of the snack food Pillows. On another day, I would go to the nearest barbecue place and buy eight sticks of pork barbecue.

But in general, I love food that is sweet. It's hard for me to qualify them further into a more detailed classification tree. What matters is that they are delicious and I feel good stuffing them up in my mouth. Especially chocolates and ice cream. The sensation of putting them on my tongue and then biting off the soft luscious stuff gives me good vibes.

I also love meat. It has a different taste than chocolates and ice cream, but usually there is still some kind of sweetness to them. My absolute favourites are beef steak, Hungarian sausages and fried chicken. You just have to love their juiciness. When you bite into them, the oil and juices ooze out which enhance the flavour upon flooding your tongue. That sensation amplifies by chewing them. The texture of the meat, rubbing onto your tongue and palate, distinguishes the experience of eating different kinds of meat. Finally, swallowing all of that causes satisfaction.

Just writing about these seriously makes me drool! I'm gonna eat something now. Bye!

The Holy Grail of Computer Scientists, and Me

In recent months I have been in deep study of quantum mechanics. It is one of the most difficult fields of physics, and its main results are far-reaching in the sciences, being monumental to the development of digital technology. Despite all this, humans have not yet pushed the limits of what quantum mechanics can do. There is one exceedingly difficult machine to make, which up to now is still a hypothetical object. That is the quantum computer.

Considered the holy grail of computer science, it is a computer which is supposedly of unprecedented power and speed, incomparable to the best digital computers of our age. This sheer power lies in the possibility of using quantum particles instead of the transistors, found in digital computers, to store information. Mankind is still incapable of manufacturing this computer, but once it is made publicly accessible the world will change radically. The quantum computer will allow extremely powerful calculations that will predict previously unpredictable phenomena such as weather, natural calamities and the stock market in a virtually omniscient manner. In a sense, men will become more like gods, masters of nature.

It has become my holy grail, too. The thought of inventing something that will change the world makes me wildly excited, and so does the picture of becoming a nerdy billionaire like Bill Gates. However, don't get me wrong. I am sincerely interested in the pursuit of the quantum computer. Physics and computer science, after all, are my favorite subjects since high school.

For a humble undergraduate physics student in the Philippines, there is a long and arduous path to tread, which involves graduating at least a *cum laude* so that I have a good chance of being accepted to a globally prestigious graduate school. But I know I can do it.

Encounter With a Creepy Beggar Boy

“I’m sorry. I don’t have any coins I can give you. And I’m in a hurry.” What a lie. The sound of jingling coins in my pocket is quite obvious. I’m sure the beggar boy could tell, too. But I really am in a hurry. The call time for performers is 4:30 P.M. at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. I glance again at my watch, reading 5:02 P.M. That confirms I’m late.

“*Kuya*, can you at least give me what’s left of your burger?” the boy asks, tugging at my t-shirt. “I don’t want to! I love this baby,” I reply, looking to run away. But his hand suddenly grabs my wrist, and it feels freezing cold. That stuns me a bit, forcing me to swat away the little boy’s hand off me. The first time fails, because the hand is locked on tightly. On the second time, the hand does get swatted away, but what I strike feels unnaturally solid and cold, like ice.

“What was that?!?” I ask rhetorically, not expecting the boy to have a working knowledge of general biology. Creeped out, I immediately turn around to head for my destination. But then I sense a warm viscous fluid on the palm of my hand. I raise that hand to check it out, and what I see is crimson blood smothered on it.

“I was just very hungry, *Kuya*. Why were you so selfish?” the boy now asks with the raspy low voice of a grown adult. That ominous change in voice sends goosebumps through my spine, and my arms start to shake violently as I turn my head slowly.

There on the sidewalk is a frail looking body, draped in tattered and dirty clothing. Held on one hand is a paper cup, presumably for coins. The other hand, directly pointing at me, is bloody with a slit wound on the wrist. *And on the torso is a gaping hole!*