

PHILIPPINES

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Introduction

The growth of special education in the Philippines has been given a relatively good support all these years both by the government, non-government organizations and stakeholders in response to the needs and challenges of the times. The level of awareness of both the government and the private sector in providing equal opportunities to children with special needs have considerably increased. One positive development in special education is the implementation of Republic Act 7277, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, an Act providing for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into the mainstream of society. In support of this legislation, the Department of Education has directed all school divisions in the country to establish Special Education Centers to help provide effective delivery of special education services nationwide.

Although special education in the country started 94 years ago, in many respects, the demands and needs of this program have not changed.

The advent of the 21st century requires new perspectives and directions in special education to meet the needs of the disadvantaged children against the persistent challenges and demands of the new millenium.

Special Education in the Country

Several years back, Dr. Teresita G. Inciong in her country report in practically the same Forum, cited some problems and concerns which beset the SPED program in the country. In partnership efforts with other government agencies, non-government organizations and other stakeholders, we are slowly generating positive results.

Below are some of the concerns besetting the SPED programs which have been correspondingly addressed:

1. Inadequate Special Education Services Throughout the Country

Table 1 (See Annex 1) shows the enrolment report of children with special needs in schools nationwide. Since 1994 or in a span of 6 years, there's a steady increase in the number of clients being served in schools. This may be attributed to the availability of teachers trained in special education. While there is still a good number of special children who are unaccounted for, either they are out of school or in school but have

not been identified, somehow it can be told that the SPED program in the country is now a "milestone towards making a dream".

The implementation of the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons has strongly supported the possible improvement of the delivery of special education services.

2. Limited Facilities, Materials and Equipment for Systematic and Scientific Early Identification and Screening Procedure

This remains a drawback in some of the public elementary schools with SPED programs. Except a handful of schools like the Philippine School for the Deaf (PSD) which is one of the special schools in the country. PSD has acquired a state of the art building from Hongkong-Shanghai Banking Corporation equipped with modern facilities and equipment which facilitates accurate and scientific screening procedure for early identification of children with hearing problems. In the same manner, from the private sector specifically St. Lukes Hospital and the University of Santo Tomas Hospital provide services like Infant Screening as early as 2 days old.

3. Early Intervention Program Is Not Sufficient

An initiative has been undertaken by the SPED Division of the Department of Education in collaboration with Christoffel Blinden-mission International, an NGO in conducting Training Workshops since 1998 for SPED and regular teachers, social workers and parents of children with disabilities for them to be trained in the home teaching process using the Portage Guide to Early Intervention. Early childhood care education has been our focus in recent years by training preschool regular teachers on inclusive education and early intervention.

The University of the Philippines - Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH), Department of Rehabilitation Medicine and the Rotary Club of Manila San Miguel has put up a hospital-based pre-school building where appropriate educational intervention is provided by a teacher from the Division of City Schools, Manila.

Moreover, the participation of the private sector is evident. St. Francis K-6 Inclusive School, a private school in Metro Manila with funding assistance from Japan Ear Foster Parent provides early intervention program for children with special needs.

4. Fast Turn-Over of Special Education Teachers

A good number of SPED trained teachers has left the service in favor of a better pay offered by schools abroad. Or, some easily get promoted to higher positions.

One way of holding back teachers from leaving their jobs is to provide incentives and welfare benefits. The Department of Education issued DECS Order No. 5, s. 1998 which articulates among others the need to reclassify regular teachers items to special education teachers' items.

In other words, salaries of regular teachers who are actually providing educational services to children with special needs are upgraded 3 grades higher than the salary grade the teacher is receiving.

5. Imbalance Between the Demand and Supply for SPED-Trained Personnel

Institutionalization of the SPED program in regular schools was mandated through DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997. This was deemed important to be able to address the increasing demand of clients with special needs in the light of the dearth of trained SPED teachers. Through the directive all school divisions throughout the country are required to organize at least one SPED Center in each school division.

Recently, the Special Education Division in collaboration with Christoffel Blindenmission International conducted training workshops by cluster regions in Luzon to train trainers on inclusive education who will in turn take the role of training the regular teachers within their localities. Similarly, other NGOs like the Resources for the Blind, Inc. (RBI), Philippine Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled (PFRD), Katipunan ng Maykapansanan sa Pilipinas, Inc (KAMPI) and the Personnel Managers Association of the Philippines (PMAP) take active role in the exercise of capability building and preparing our teachers especially the regular teachers in handling children with special needs.

6. Attitudinal Barrier

This is the worst barrier and considered very critical especially in the implementation of a viable and systematic special education program.

Information dissemination campaigns and strengthening the advocacy programs through parent education, orientation sessions with the regular teachers, school administrators, other school personnel, the students and the community helped a lot in the gradual removal of this barrier.

Recent developments showed that the Commission on Higher Education has directed all teacher-training institutions to offer in the curriculum units in special education. This will entitle each prospective teacher gain and equip himself/herself the knowledge and skills of handling children with special needs. The role of the teachers in educating all caregivers is crucial which in the process will help reduce this menace.

7. Lack of Coordination Among Government Agencies in the Provision of Programs and Services

While there are no consolidated efforts in coming up a systematic program from identification to transition of children with special needs before, this time the Department of Social Welfare and Development through the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) has taken the lead role in this task. Inter-agency meetings among departments of the government are regularly held to thresh out issues and concerns

and map out plans for the benefit of the marginalized sector.

8. Dearth of Researches and Studies re Children with Special Needs

The field of special education has in recent years gained recognition among enthusiasts, like teachers and even parents to embark into research and furthering their studies along the area of special education most especially on inclusive education. This is a positive development in special education especially with the offering of special education units in the curriculum of teacher-training institutions or in the pre-service level. With special education as the chosen area, it is expected in a few years time we will be generating a good source of data we can use in program development and improvement.

IMPROVING QUALITY AND ACCESS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Our efforts are geared towards the intensification of measures to ensure quality special education. As we realize, the present time is characterized by enormous development of information technology that somehow affects special education in the country.

Concerted efforts have focused on the identification of strategies. These strategies are seen through some initiatives that are likely to meet the many challenges and ever-changing demands of the time.

For the past two decades, the trend in the education of children with special needs is towards the promotion of integration and participation as against segregation.

To help enhance participation rate among children with special needs, inclusive education has become the main thrust in the education of children with special needs in the Philippines. This is implemented through the organization of SPED Center as resource center in special needs education. At present there are already 133 SPED Centers throughout the country.

One model of inclusive education in the Philippines is the mainstreaming program. This can be either partial or total. Its operationalization is best exemplified in the Special Education Center where the Center is part of the regular elementary or secondary school. The shifting of disabled children in the regular class becomes a part of the school program because the children are already within the school. Operating on the principle of placement in the "least restrictive environment" the mainstreaming program can be the Philippine commitment to inclusive education.

There are approaches identified to make inclusive education work in regular schools. These approaches are as follows:

1. Establishment of a SPED Center which will function as a Resource Center to:
 - 1.1 support children with special needs enrolled in regular schools'
 - 1.2 assist in the conduct of in-service trainings for regular teachers, administrators and prospective SPED teachers;
 - 1.3 conduct continuous assessment of children with disabilities and their referral; and
 - 1.4 produce appropriate teaching materials.

2. Information, Dissemination and Education
 - 2.1 Explanation of the concepts of integrated education and inclusive schools to parents and family members, administrators, supervisors and the community
 - 2.2 In-Service trainings in special needs education for all Classroom (Receiving) Teachers
 - 2.3 Continuous orientation of the school personnel and pupils in inclusive schools

3. Strengthening the Support Services which include the following:
 - 3.1 Hiring of trained SPED teachers to serve as Resource Teacher/Itinerant Teacher/ Consulting Teacher
 - 3.2 Continuous in-service training of SPED teachers and administrators
 - 3.3 Provision of specialists like physical therapist, speech therapist and other specialists whenever available
 - 3.4 Hiring of teacher-aides from trained parents, community-based rehabilitation workers, community volunteers and others with specialized trainings
 - 3.5 Implementation of the "buddy" system where a trained classmate can be paired with a pupil who has disability
 - 3.6 Provisions of instructional materials, assistance devices and essential equipment

4. Parent and Community Involvement
 - 4.1 Provision of parent education
 - 4.2 Involving families, people with disabilities and the community in the decision-making process
 - 4.3 Linkage with other Gos and NGOs working for children with disabilities

5. Utilization of the Team Approach to Mastery (TAM)
(DedeJohnston, Will Proctor and Susan Corey)

In TAM classrooms, students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers throughout the entire school day' there is an average ratio of two nondisabled children to each child with disability.

Supporting the SPED Centers are other programs, namely:

Special Classes

- Special Day Schools
- Residential Schools
- Special Education Centers
- Itinerant Teaching Program
- Resource Room Program
- Hospital Schools

Table 2 (Annex 2) shows the existing educational facilities for children with special needs.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS

In pursuance of our goals to the cause of inclusive education in the 21st century some alternative models in the delivery of educational services for children with special needs are put in place:

1. *Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Services*

This program is presently undertaken by the National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) with funding assistance from Christoffel Blindenmission International (CBMI). It has for its pilot project in Parapaque City, Metro Manila which will hopefully end this year.

As an alternative delivery system, the approach of CBR has widely been recognized and accepted as the most suitable and viable way of providing comprehensive rehabilitation services and equal opportunities to the majority of persons with disabilities.

Similar efforts are undertaken by some NGOs like Simon of Cyrene Foundation in the Bicol Region and Resources for the Blind, Inc. in Nueva Ecija.

2. *Home-Based Instruction for the Handicapped*

This is one model of a community-based rehabilitation service, where instruction takes place in the home. Resource materials in the form of modules are provided for the special child to work on. Parents, parateachers or community volunteers who will act as facilitators are trained to provide the delivery of services. The facilitator follows a systematic program of skills and guides. The child will sequentially go through each task until mastery is achieved.

3. *Community-Based SPED Program*

This is an instructional delivery system where the child with special needs is taught particular skills in a natural setting such as the home or any convenient place in the community. This serves as an outreach program of the Special Education Division of the Department of Education addressing the needs of out-of-school handicapped children and youth ages 8-18 years old.

It has a special feature of accrediting the clientele's home study in a regular school program of the parents as the clientele desire it. This is done by recommending the child with special educational needs to take the PEPT (Philippine Educational Placement Test) after giving all the lessons for the CBSPED program. The result of this test will determine the grade placement of the child in the school.

4. *Vocational Program*

The ultimate aim of education is to develop in the learner desirable knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that can effectively used to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life of the individual. Thus, vocational program is an important component of the curriculum for children with special needs. Educational opportunities and other services

are provided in order to maximize their potentials and become productive and improve their quality of life, thus ensuring their integration in the mainstream of society.

In the Philippines, various vocational programs are designed to meet diversified needs of children with special needs. This may come through apprenticeship program, sheltered workshops and the like.

For students with mental retardation, a vocational training program has been conceived as an alternative secondary program. Mentally retarded adolescents are equipped in the school with vocational skills and are recommended to train in the community.

SPED PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

In our efforts to further enhance inclusive education, the following initiatives are presently considered:

A. SPED Personnel Enhancement Program for Inclusive Education

For the government to keep the quality of teachers and school administrators and supervisors for special education and for inclusive education it is but imperative to provide them capability building exercises:

Among those initiated by the Special Education Division are the following:

1. Summer Training Program for Teachers of the Hearing Impaired and the Visually Impaired
2. Training Workshop for Teachers of Children with Mental Handicap
3. Scholarship Program on Organization, Administration and Supervision in Special Education (One summer and a five-month duration with a ten-week practicum)
4. Mobile Training for Trainers in SPED
5. Training Program for Teachers in the School Integration of Children with Autism
6. Competence Enhancement of SPED Personnel through National Conferences/Congresses

Table 3 (Annex 3) presents the number of teachers handling children with special needs. Majority of these teachers have received training in special education.

B. Resource Materials Development for Children with Special Needs

One of the functions of the Special Education Division is to undertake studies necessary for the preparation of instructional/resource materials for special education. It has designed the following preparations:

1. Materials Production in Braille and in Large Print

The Philippine Printing House for the Blind (PPHB) an attached office of the SPED Division, prepares all textbooks in braille and in large print. These materials are later distributed to schools with organized classes for the blind upon request. Closely helping the PPHB in this undertaking is the Resources for the Blind, Inc. (RBI) an NGO, which does massive production of resource materials in braille through the use of computers.

2. Development, Finalization and Printing of Handbooks on:

- 2.1 Inclusive Education
- 2.2 Educating Children with Learning Disabilities
- 2.3 Educating Children with Behavior Problems
- 2.4 Socio-Recreational and Sports Activities
- 2.5 Learning Competencies for the Gifted (LCG) and Enrichment Materials (EM) for Grades I-III

Except for Nos. 2.1 and 2.5, the rest are still in the process of finalization and printing.

C. Researches on Children with Special Needs

To ensure a baseline data for program development, the following initiatives are ventured into:

1. Curriculum Redirections for Children with Special Needs
2. Impact of Modified Curriculum Program for Special Learners
3. Comparative Study on the Marginal Competencies of Trained and Untrained Administrators in the Implementation of Inclusive Education
4. Development of Program Models for CSNs
 - 4.1 Program Models for Gifted Learners
 - 4.2 Computer Assisted Instructions (CAI) for the Gifted
 - 4.3 Headstart Program for the Gifted
 - 4.4 Integrated Education for Working Children

D. Networking

Multiplicity of partnerships and collaboration with government agencies, educational institutions, civics organizations and international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO-INNOTECH, Perkins School for the Blind, Mombusho Scholarship of Japan, National Institute for Special Education (NISE), Christoffel Blindenmission International (CBMI), Resources for the Blind, Inc. (RBI) have indeed provided difference in the growth of special education in the country.

Most recent development is the just concluded 15h Asian Conference on Mental Retardation which the Philippines hosted a week ago. The Conference has provided a healthy forum for Filipino and foreign practitioners as well to network and exchange ideas that would redound to the betterment and improvement of educational services for children with special needs.

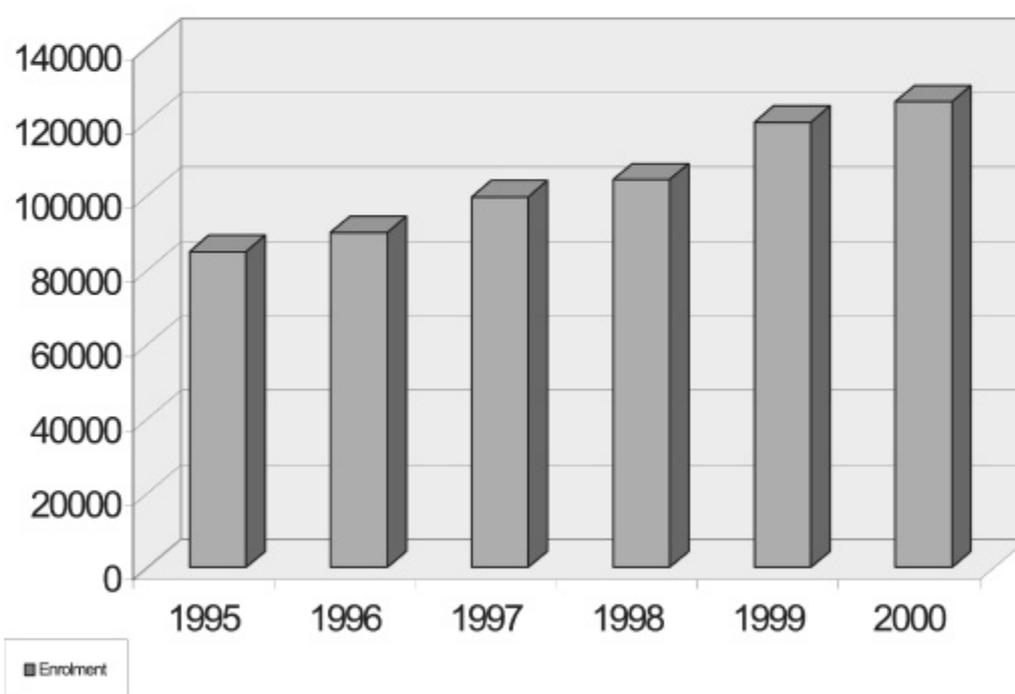
FUTURE CONCERNS AND PROJECTS

As we continue to strive for excellence in the delivery of educational services, the continuing challenge upon us is to provide the best to all children within the mainstream through highly effective and innovative strategies in an enriched and conducive learning environment.

Recognizing the new age of education, the following strategies are identified to hopefully stimulate the challenges of the times:

1. Development of home-based, community based early intervention and other alternative means of service delivery for children with disabilities;
2. Education of parents and families of children with disabilities;
3. Conduct of positive attitude formation program aimed at non-disabled persons in the education system (e.g. school authorities, teachers and students) to break stereotyping of persons with disabilities;
4. Organization of logistical support (e.g. transport and accommodation) to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in education programs;
5. Introduction of parent-teacher consultative groups to assist schools in responding to individual educational needs of children with disabilities, as as to ensure successful integration in individual cases;
6. Gradual integration of special education into mainstream inclusive education;
7. Strengthening/updating of training/refresher program for school teachers and other school personnel to improve their capabilities for developing the full potential of students with disabilities;
8. Dissemination of teacher resource materials for use of children with special learning needs;
9. Organization of additional support for regular classroom teachers;
10. Revision of procedures for the administration of examinations to enable children and adults with disabilities to obtain academic qualification, including higher education qualifications;
11. Use of technology and organizations of services to improve access to textbooks and reference materials in appropriate formats; and
12. Strengthen partnership and collaboration in regional and international levels.

Truly the present and the future waves of transformation brought about by this era place us at the advantage of bridging special education of yesterday and special education of tomorrow. We, in education afterall, prepares tomorrow's adults not only for a life of work but also a life of worth.

Table 1**Enrolment of Children with Special Needs (CSNs)**

SY	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Enrolment	85025	90145	99721	104323	119807	125283

Table 2
Existing Educational Facilities for Children with Special Needs

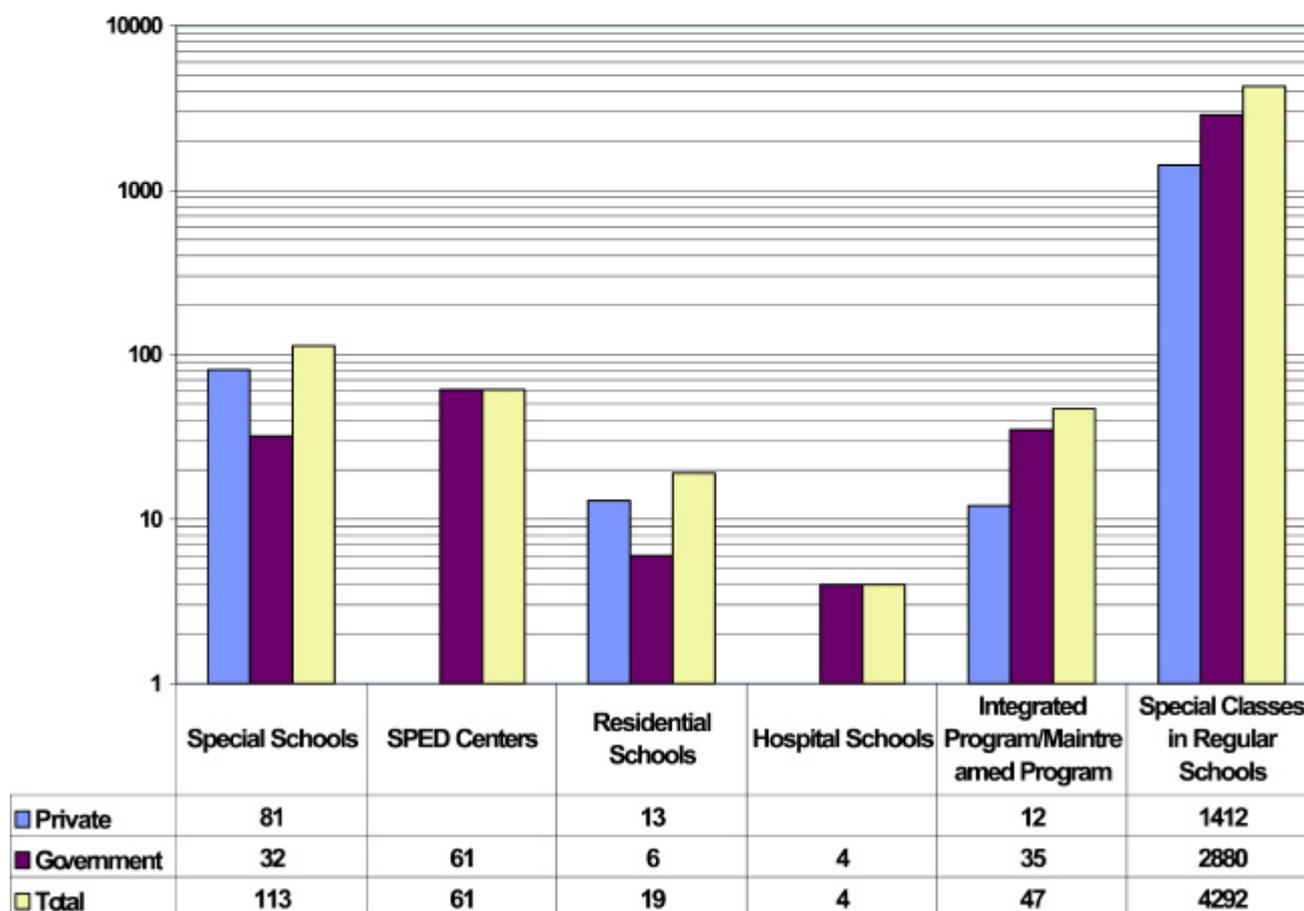


Table 3

**Number of Teachers for Children with Special Needs
Elementary Secondary
1998-1999**

