

CHAPTER 2

Department of Education: When reforms don't transform¹

In 1925, Yale professor George Counts observed key problems in Philippine basic education that, alas, still resonate today. Half of the children were outside the reach of schools. Pupil performance was generally low in subjects that relied on English, although achievement in math and science was at par with the average performance of American schoolchildren. The functional literacy of Filipino pupils left much to be desired, constraining learning in later grades.

Counts attributed these problems to the content and language of teaching in a culturally diverse colony. Hewing to the view that the learning process is embedded in its context, which progressive thinkers like John Dewey advocated at the time, Counts bewailed the teaching of subjects in English in the absence of a *lingua franca*. This, he argued, redounded to a sacrifice of efficiency of instruction in the native tongue.

Apart from language, Counts described the Filipino children of the 1920s as handicapped by their reliance on experiences drawn from a civilization alien to them. Not only were they acquiring new ideas in a language not their own, they were also studying under a curriculum borrowed directly from the United States, using materials suited for American children. Exacerbating this situation was the centralized administration of education in the colony, which mandated the uniform implementation of a Western curriculum

throughout the archipelago. Considering the great diversity of climate, occupation, and cultural tradition in the Philippines, Counts deemed this practice indefensible.

Finally, Counts focused on the teacher factor and the quality of instruction. The lack of professional training of the more than 27,000 teachers at the time hampered Philippine education. Accordingly, instruction would be inferior to that of the United States until this problem was addressed.

From 1925, when Counts published his article as part of the 1925 Monroe Survey team, up to the 1990s, various reviews of the state of education [Box 2.1] had cited the same fundamental issues afflicting Philippine education. These include high dropout rates, low pupil performance, poor teacher quality (in a system where teachers were—and are still—central to the education process), a language of learning that was not attuned to scientific findings on cognition, irrelevant learning

¹ Condensed from Bautista, Bernardo, and Ocampo [2008] "When Reforms Don't Transform: A Review of Institutional Reforms in the Department of Education (1990-2008)," background paper prepared for the PHDR 2008/2009. The original paper with complete footnotes is available at <http://hdn.org.ph/papers-and-publications>.

Box 2.1 Surveys, sector studies, reform packages and major development projects in basic education¹

The work of the Department Education (DepEd) has been guided by numerous comprehensive surveys that point to the problems of the educational system and the causes of these problems. As shown in the timeline below, through the decades, the surveys have pointed to essentially the same problems and the education department's inability to reform the system. In recent years, the work of reforming the problematic educational system has also been guided and assisted by several large-scale reform programs and projects. Is the DepEd able to learn the right lessons from these projects?

Review and Reform	Key Features
1925 Monroe Survey	First comprehensive survey of Philippine education. Observed problems regarding low levels of student achievement and pointed to the use of English in instruction, teaching qualifications, educational facilities, and centralization or lack of adaptation of education to needs of the Filipino people as the main causes of low achievement level.
1936 Commonwealth Survey	Sought the opinions of educational "experts" but did not involve systematic gathering of primary data on the educational processes and outcomes.
1949 UNESCO Survey	First comprehensive survey of Philippine education after American colonial period. Reiterated many of problems noted in Monroe and Commonwealth Surveys. Noted that language of instruction remains "the most perplexing problem" and additional problem of lack of appreciation of national heritage and ideals. Recommended improved budget for education, efforts to improve teacher qualifications, restoration of Grade 7, strengthening community school movement, and resolution of language issue through vigorous research program.
1960 Swanson Survey	Reiterated observations of previous surveys and also noted problems in the education of cultural minorities and in the adaptation of foreign educational practices to local conditions. Lamented how recommendation of previous surveys had not become effective because of poor financing, difficulty in getting public understanding, and inertia to change. Called for prioritization of investments for primary education and strengthening secondary education.
1967 Review of the Swanson Survey	Found that many of the recommendations of the 1960 Swanson Survey had not been implemented by the Department of Education.
1970 Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education (PCSPPE)	Reiterated many of the findings of previous surveys. Reiterated the language problem, but further noted the mismatch between educational output and country needs. Called for the reorganization of the educational system to address overcentralization—which resulted in the creation of the Bureau of Higher Education (BHE), Bureau of Nonformal Education (BNFE), Educational Project Implementation Task Force (EDPITAF), and National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC)—and for a political solution to the language problem.
1972 Ten-Year National Development Program	Education Development Decree of 1972 defined a 10-year education plan that focused on curriculum development, upgrading physical facilities, adoption of cost-saving instructional technology, retraining of teachers and administrators, accreditation, admissions testing, guidance and counseling, democratizing access through financial assistance, and shifting funding of basic education from national to local government.
1973 Instructional Management by Parents, Community and Teachers (IMPACT)	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) project supported by the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC) and the Netherlands government implemented in the Philippines and Indonesia that involved the use of modularized self-instructional systems with the support of parents and community-based instructional managers to provide access to education to students in remote areas in the country.
1976 Survey of Outcome of Elementary Education (SOUTELE)	Measurement and analysis of learning outcomes of a sample of Grade 4 students in the country that included surveys of school, teacher, and student characteristics. Indicated poor achievement levels even in basic reading, writing, and quantitative skills. Noted differences across socioeconomic conditions of students and school environments, and explicitly linked socioeconomic inequalities in society to differences in educational outcomes.
1982-1989 Program for Decentralized Education (PRODED)	Funded by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Focused on improving the curriculum to strengthen the emphasis on science, technology, math, reading, and writing.
1988-1995 Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP)	Funded by the IBRD to sustain the curriculum reforms initiated in PRODED in the secondary education curriculum. Aimed at expanding access to secondary education by implementing a student-centered, community-oriented curriculum.
Education for All Philippine Plan of Action 1991-1999 (EFA I)	A national action plan formulated in the wake of President Corazon Aquino's proclamation declaring 1990-1999 as the Decade of Education for All (EFA). Adopted policies and strategies that included alternative learning systems covering nonformal and informal education; improvement of learning achievement stressing creative and critical thinking; upgrading of teacher competencies; strengthening of partnership among school, home, the community, and local government; and self-reliance in resources generation.
1991 Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM)	Comprehensive study that reiterated many of the problems that were stated in earlier surveys, which resulted in a 12-item Legislative Agenda and a comprehensive set of program recommendations and operational priorities. Congress enacted seven of these items into law, but the DepEd and other educational agencies have failed to implement most of the program recommendations. Included the first basic articulation of the principles of decentralization and school-based management in the basic education sector.

1990-1996 Second Elementary Education Project	Under the World Bank-funded Second Elementary Education Project, four experiments addressed the problem of dropouts in low-income communities: school feeding programs, use of multilevel learning materials, school feeding programs with parent participation, and use of multilevel learning materials with parent participation.
1994-2002 Philippine Non-Formal Education Project	Funded by the Asian Development Bank. Focused on improving literacy and numeracy skills among the uneducated, enhancing their capacities for self-help activities, and expanding access to basic education by supporting nonformal education programs for youth and adults. Also focused on capacity building of the DepEd and nongovernment organizations, and communities for managing and conducting nonformal education programs.
1989-1992 Philippines-Australia Science and Mathematics Education Project (PASMEP)	Funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). Aimed at improving the effectiveness of science and mathematics education at the secondary level by improving the curriculum, management, and curriculum support services.
1996-2001 Project in Basic Education (PROBE)	Funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). Focused on improving quality of teaching and learning in science, mathematics, and English in basic education. Had various components, including textbook development and teacher training.
1998 Philippine Education Sector Study (WB/ADB PESS 1998)	Study by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. Noted numerous problems allocated to management of education sector: misallocation of public sector spending, low quality at high unit cost, poor access to mass education; skills development for competitiveness, general sector management. Posed many policy options that related to institutions reforms, improved sector management, improving investments and access to basic education, while reiterating recommendations of previous surveys.
1998-2006 Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP)	Funded by Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the World Bank. Focused on civil works, educational processes development (including student assessment, in-service training of teachers, curriculum and instructional resources development) and school-based management principles in finance and administration.
2000 Philippine Human Development Report (PHDR 2000)	Reiterated key points from previous surveys, but highlighted the problems of quality of educational services for the poor and the inefficiencies in the allocation of educational resources. Pointed to the need to ensure that the elements of the educational processes are relevant to the lives of Filipinos living in different communities, and the possibility of rethinking curricula and pedagogies to make the educational system more responsive to human and social development goals.
2000 Presidential Commission for Educational Reform (PCER 2000)	Picked up from recommendations of EDCOM, PESS, and Philippine EFA Assessment. Proposed nine key reforms, four of which were relevant to basic education: the creation of National Coordination Council for Education, strengthening teacher competencies at basic education level, expanding options for medium of instruction in early grades, and the establishment of National Education Evaluation and Testing System.
2000 Philippine EFA Assessment	Noted the significant gains in providing access to primary schools and improving basic literacy rates, but reiterated problems regarding international and external efficiencies of the system, and the need to improve functional literacy rates.
2000-2006 Secondary Education Development and Improvement Project (SEDIP)	Funded by the Asian Development Bank and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). Had similar goals and components as the TEEP, but focusing on secondary education.
2002-2007 Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM)	Funded by the Australian Agency for International Aid (AusAID). Focused on capacity building of education personnel at all levels, curriculum and materials development, and programs to improve access to quality education to indigenous peoples, Muslim groups and multicultural communities.
2005-present Strengthening Implementation of Visayas Education (STRIVE)	Funded by the AusAID. Has similar goals and project components as BEAM (i.e., capacity building, materials development, improving access to quality education), but focusing on schools in the Visayan provinces.
2006-2010 Sixth Country Program for Children	Supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Incorporated the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) Program which focused on transforming primary schools into child-friendly learning systems by providing resources and training for teachers, school heads, and division supervisors on child-friendly principles, approaches and practices (See also First to Fifth UNICEF country programs).
2006 Philippine Education for All 2015 Plan	Defines specific targets under the broad aim of achieving functional literacy for all Filipinos. Articulates several key tasks, including the assessment of school performance, expansion of early child care and development, transformation of nonformal and informal delivery systems into alternative learning systems, improvement of teaching practices, adoption of a 12-year basic education cycle, and several enabling conditions related to the management of reforms.
2006-present Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA)	Integrated reform framework articulated by the DepEd that provides a coherent conceptual and policy structure for the various reforms needed by the system, particularly the targets defined in the Philippine EFA 2015 plans and the Millennium Development Goals. Focuses on key reform targets related to the implementation of school-based management, improvement of teaching quality, curriculum, and pedagogy in the key learning areas, and incorporates the Philippine EFA 2015 plans, among others.

¹ The table does not provide a comprehensive list of all the surveys and reform projects that have been undertaken in the past century, and instead highlights some of the significant ones for illustrative purposes.

materials, excessive centralization, and inadequate financial resources. The persistence of these issues prompted leading educationists to facetiously say the education landscape had not changed since colonial days.

Significant reform initiatives, limited transformative effects

Yet a closer look at developments in the last 20 years reveals significant changes in Philippine education. Since the 1990s several important broad frameworks for education reform have been instituted—Education for All: The Philippine Plan of Action 1990-1999 (EFA I); the 1991 Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM); the 2000 Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER); the 1998 Philippine Education Sector Study (PESS); the 2000 Education for All (EFA) Assessment; the 2006 National Action Plan for Education for All 2015 (EFA 2015); and the 2006 Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA).

EDCOM, for instance, formulated a comprehensive reform agenda with far-reaching goals: the attainment of functional literacy through universal basic education; the formation of necessary skills and knowledge for productive citizenship; and the development of high-level professionals who will produce new knowledge, instruct the young, and provide leadership in various fields of a dynamic economy [EDCOM, 1991:1-2].

Like prior surveys, EDCOM decried the deteriorating quality of Philippine education, claiming that elementary and high school graduates lacked the average citizen's competencies to live responsible, productive, and self-fulfilling lives. Graduates of colleges and technical/vocational schools, on the other hand, did not match the development needs of the economy while the country's graduate schools had failed to generate research-based knowledge that could spur the creation of new jobs and increase the value of production.

EDCOM noted the country's low investment in education compared to Asian neighbors and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the poor man-

agement of its huge bureaucracy. It specifically recommended the following:

- 1.** Prioritization of basic education to ensure the undivided attention of the then Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) to this sector
- 2.** Development of alternative learning modes, especially for literacy acquisition
- 3.** Use of the mother tongue as the language of learning from Grades 1 to 3, with Filipino gradually becoming the medium of instruction in basic education and English a subsidiary medium of instruction in later years
- 4.** Expansion and enrichment of technical/vocational education
- 5.** Strengthening of pre-service teacher education and provision of incentives to make the rewards of teaching commensurate to its importance as a career
- 6.** Support for both public and private education
- 7.** Facilitation of planning, delivery, and education financing and training by industry, workers, teachers, parents, and local governments
- 8.** Greater access of poor children to all levels of education
- 9.** More cost-effective public college and university education with curricular programs that are relevant to the communities they serve
- 10.** The search for new sources of funds, including taxes, to finance basic education
- 11.** Restructuring of the Department of Education (DepEd) to ensure clearer program focus, rational resource allocation, and realistic planning

EDCOM succeeded in the trifocalization of education, splitting the education function

among three government agencies: the DepEd for basic education, both formal and nonformal; the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for higher education; and the Technical Education and Skills Development Agency (TESDA) for non-degree or middle-level skills development. Subsequent plans for Philippine education—PCER, EFA 2015, and BESRA—built on EDCOM’s analysis and framework.

Considering EDCOM’s significance and high profile, one would have expected the DECS (now DepEd) to embark on the systematic implementation of the recommendations for basic education. The opposite happened, however. Because of the extensive course-plotting of Congress, two DECS secretaries rejected the EDCOM recommendations during the consultations and immediately after the release of the report. Not surprisingly, the annex of the 1998 PESS indicated positive action by the DepEd and other relevant agencies on only 13 out of the 30 program recommendations related to basic education.

Although its recommendations for basic education were also not acted upon, the PCER report contributed significantly to the education reform process by reiterating EDCOM’s specific call for school-based management. The draft policy instrument on the governance of the basic education sector in the PCER annex became the basis for Republic Act No. 9155, or the Basic Education Governance Act of 2001, a landmark law that transferred, at least in theory, the governance of basic education to schools. RA 9155 also defined the scope and meaning of basic education based on the basic learning needs propounded earlier by EFA I. Hence, RA 9155 constituted the first official recognition of the Alternative Learning System as part and parcel of the delivery of basic education.

EDCOM and PCER provided the framework for more than a dozen major reform projects undertaken with DepEd involvement since the late 1980s. These projects addressed both structural-functional imperatives (e.g., decentralization) and substantive learning concerns (e.g., curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and teaching standards). Some of them were the harbingers of a paradigm shift from educa-

tion to learning, from the centrality of the teacher to that of the learner and the learning environment, and from uniform pedagogies and content to context-specific learning.

In particular, the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM), which gives premium to the development of higher-order thinking skills, was a major source of the new National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) [DepEd, 2008]. Promulgated in 2006, the NCBTS aimed to transform classroom learning by enjoining teachers to focus on learning in diverse contexts. The NCBTS was the product of an unprecedented agreement among stakeholders within the education community on the meaning of good teaching and competent teachers.

A review of completed projects and evaluations of ongoing ones reveal significant improvements in pupil performance, among many other achievements. However, despite substantial gains, the issues of formal basic education continue to plague the nation. Aggravated by increasing population, dropout rates remain significant and have persisted for more than four decades since the 1960s. From 28 percent to 34 percent of the population does not reach or complete Grade 6 [HDN, 2000:3]. The rate of high school completion for children who enroll in Grade 1 is less than 50 percent [World Bank, 2004:3]. In the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), admittedly the poorest region of the country in terms of human development, only 10 percent reach senior year [ADB TA4524, 2007].

Comparing the Philippines and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the World Bank’s education data show that Laos and Cambodia had both higher primary net enrollment rates and completion rates than the Philippines in 2006 and 2007 [World Bank, 2008]. Only 72 percent of Filipino children completed their primary schooling compared to 75 percent of Laotian and 87 percent of Cambodian children. The contrast with Indonesia and Malaysia is quite stark. The two countries the Philippines once hoped would form the Malay subregional grouping MAPHILINDO (Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia) with it in

the 1960s had much higher primary enrollment rates (96 percent and almost 100 percent, respectively) and completion rates (99 percent and 95 percent, respectively).

Achievement in formal basic education has also remained pathetically low. Only 15.3 percent of elementary schools crossed the 75 percent level—the required minimum competency for the next level of schooling—in the 2006 National Achievement Test (NAT) while 52.3 percent crossed the 60 percent “near mastery” level in the same year. The situation is worse for high schools. Figures show that less than 1 percent made it past the 75 percent level in School Year 2005-2006 while only 13 percent crossed the 60 percent level. The mean percentage score was a very low 45.8 percent [JBIC, 2006].

Compared to the performance of Filipino pupils in science and math in the 1920s, which approximated that of American children, current-day performance in these subjects is dismal. Only 25.3 percent of schools crossed the 75 percent level in math while a very low 8.4 percent did so in science in the 2006 NAT. Moreover, students from about half of the schools did not even learn 60 percent of what they ought to in the two subjects [Bautista, 2007].

Interestingly, the Philippine Science High School, the country’s premier science high school, attained math scores higher than the international mean in the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) but at the level only of the average scores of Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In science, its performance was lower than the international mean and only a point higher than Botswana’s score and a point lower than Indonesia’s [TIMSS, 2003].

More bothersome are the results of the 2007 Regional Assessment in Mathematics, Science, and English (RAMSE) that BEAM conducted on a sample of Grade 4 and high school sophomores from the Davao region (Region XI), SOCCSKSARGEN (Region XII), and the ARMM. The Grade 4 pupils had difficulty answering the test items. Not only did they fail to meet the required minimum mastery level of 75 percent, most of them did not respond correctly to items requiring higher-order thinking skills. The high school students fared just as poorly. They

failed to apply concepts and reasoning to real-life situations, a competence expected of higher-order thinkers.

Why reforms fail to transform

The persistence of these issues for much of the 20th century and into the first decade of the 21st century highlights a distressing paradox. With its long tradition of critical assessments and reform-oriented planning, the DepEd actually incubated, tested, and proved the effectiveness of numerous reform initiatives, some of them ahead of the discourses of their time. Yet, at the start of every school year, the news media project without fail a perpetual education crisis that the mainstreaming of successful reform initiatives could have addressed.

Why reforms have not transformed education on the ground or why the DepEd has found it difficult to translate structural reforms and programmatic changes into large-scale, integrated, and sustained outcomes is the focus of this chapter. It shares insights into the education reform process through the prism of two illustrative cases: One shows the DepEd’s partial implementation of the decentralized governance of basic education; the other demonstrates its inadequate policy formulation in the area of learning and pedagogy.

The first case looks into the partial implementation of RA9155 through school-based management (SBM) in 21 percent of the country’s schools divisions through the BEAM project funded by the Australian Agency for International Aid (AusAID) and the Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP) supported by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the World Bank (WB). The case demonstrates how the following—a policy change (i.e., the decentralization of education and the corresponding revision of functions and responsibilities at various levels of the bureaucracy); policy continuity across different administrations; effective leadership at all levels; the willful implementation of plans that targeted disadvantaged schools; and the encouragement of innovations throughout schools in the

divisions covered—allowed a reform-oriented counterculture to begin taking root in the DepEd without a change in division and school personnel. In addition, this case reflects changes in processes and procedures at the central and local offices for the duration of the projects.

The second case relates the story of the country's language policy and why, despite a surfeit of international and national research supporting the use of the mother tongue in the early years of schooling, the DepEd has not revised its policy on the languages of learning and language acquisition. The story demonstrates the struggle within the DepEd and between the department and powerful segments in Philippine society of contending positions on a pedagogy-related policy with tremendous implications for learning, the preservation of local languages, and the survival of community cultures.

Strengthening the capacity of the DepEd bureaucracy to manage education reform by addressing formal and informal institutional constraints is the objective of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA). While BESRA maps the way forward, its implementation is vulnerable to the same factors that have limited the impact of previous reform efforts. This chapter concludes with BESRA's potential for catalyzing institutional change and outlines recommendations to help the DepEd succeed in translating another responsive, well-crafted, and comprehensive plan into reality.

While this chapter examines institutional factors that have constrained the transformative effects of education reform, it recognizes that some reforms would not necessarily translate into desired outcomes when the intervening variables are not within the control of the DepEd. For instance, studies by the World Bank and the National Nutrition Council have shown that no amount of academic improvement projects will improve learning achievement when brain development and physical growth are stunted by the child's unfavorable health and nutrition status.

School-based management: Decentralization that worked

The Monroe Survey's severest criticism of the Philippine education system in 1925 was its excessive centralized control which, accordingly, resulted in the lack of initiative in various branches [Smith, 1945]. Subsequent assessments of Philippine education also critiqued the tendency of the excessively centralized bureaucracy to adopt a one-size-fits-all policy for culturally diverse contexts, its unresponsiveness to local needs, and vulnerability to corruption [Bernardo and Garcia, 2006].

Basic education in the Philippines has not always been centralized, however. Adopting the U.S. education model, the American colonial government initially required municipalities and provinces to finance primary and high schools, respectively [Apilado, 2008]. But since towns and provinces were too poor to defray the costs of free and compulsory basic schooling, the insular government was compelled to assume funding for all three education levels, from elementary to college. For practical and fiscal reasons, it imposed common standards, pedagogies, and methods of administration, deviating considerably from the principles of the progressive education movement in the U.S. at the time. Such centralized education management was to remain for the rest of the century. It began to give way only in 2001 under the weight of the worldwide decentralization movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

SBM in discursive context

Decentralization through site management, or school-based management (SBM), has been a major global education reform thrust since the 1980s. Australia adopted the strategy in 1976, Britain in 1988, the U.S. in 1988, New Zealand in 1989, Hong Kong in 1991, Mexico in 1992, Thailand in 1999, and the Philippines in 2001 [Gamage and Sooksomchitra,

2004]. By giving schools the autonomy to decide administrative and substantive matters, SBM, like the movement toward participatory management in business that inspired it, aims to improve performance by making those closest to the delivery of services more accountable for the results of their operations [Hill and Bronan, 1991].

Assessment of the impact of autonomy (through SBM) on teaching and learning outcomes in the developed and developing world is mixed [Fullan and Watson 2000; Beck and Murphy, 1999; Gaziel, 1998; and Gamage and Sooksomchitra, 2004]. In developed societies, SBM increased participation in decision-making but did not seem to impact on teaching and learning when treated as a stand-alone reform that focused primarily on a change in governance structure. However, it affected school performance positively when schools, in addition to obtaining autonomy, provided for local capacity building, established rigorous external accountability through close relations between schools and communities, and stimulated access to innovations. The qualitative link of SBM to the formation of a professional learning community, greater focus on student work (or assessment literacy), changes in pedagogy, and improved student outcomes is apparent. However, quantitative analysis reveals that the impact of SBM, narrowly conceived as autonomy, on student achievement, while statistically significant, is less than that of other variables.

The combination of SBM as a mechanism for decentralized governance in education with various strategies to improve schools and student achievement has come to characterize an education reform approach, dubbed as comprehensive school reform (CSR). CSR assumes that school improvement efforts are complex and ought to systematically address every aspect of a school, i.e., “the curriculum, instruction, governance, scheduling, professional development, assessment, and parent and community involvement” [American Institute for Research et al., 2006].

In the U.S., the CSR strategy aimed to address the education crisis of the 1990s that eventually spurred the 2001 Elementary and Secondary Act, more popularly known as the “No Child Left Behind

Act.” It has since morphed into a full-fledged federal program with different models to choose from. In terms of outcomes, a 2002 analysis of student achievement in 29 leading CSR models reported statistically significant overall effects that seem to be greater than other interventions designed to achieve similar effects [Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown, 2006]. A more recent review of several CSR models reveals the promise of the approach, although achievements among effective models varied greatly, depending on the quality of implementation.

Awareness of the CSR approach is low in countries like the Philippines. However, the deteriorated state of basic education has made it imperative for reform agents in the country, whether informed by existing research and discourses or not, to consider reform interventions that are more comprehensive than piecemeal, simultaneous than sequential, and on a scale that would make a dent on the situation. As operationalized, SBM in the Philippines has the potential of helping achieve these characteristics of education reform. It has evolved into a mechanism for decentralized governance in education (that includes community involvement in school planning) as well as a framework for integrating the structural dimensions of reform with various inputs for achieving equitable access to quality education at the school level (including changes in perspectives on learning and pedagogy).

Overview of BEAM and TEEP

The 2001 Governance of Basic Education Act, or RA 9155, served as policy cover for SBM. Absent a clear plan to implement the legislation, SBM was carried out *de facto* through two externally funded projects—TEEP and BEAM [Box 2.2]. Covering 40 of the 188 schools divisions and affecting more than 12,000 schools or about a third of public elementary schools, the education and management outcomes of SBM in these divisions have been significant. These results suggest the possibility of reforming the DepEd bureaucracy given the existing staff of divisions, districts, and schools.

TEEP [JBIC, 2006] commenced in 1998 and was

completed in June 2006. Conceptualized in the context of the education crisis of the 1990s, the project consisted of three major components: civil works, education and development, and finance administration. TEEP was financed through a government loan agreement with the World Bank and JBIC.

BEAM, on the other hand, was a six-and-a-half-year DepEd project funded by a grant from AusAID. In the context of the Mindanao-wide poverty in education and the peace and order problem in the area, BEAM aimed to improve the quality of and the access to basic education in Southern and Central Mindanao, specifically in Regions XI, XII, and ARMM. Started in 2002, BEAM comprised four components: human resource development; materials development; access; and project management, monitoring, and evaluation.

Apart from the type and source of funding, BEAM and TEEP differ in the level of articulation of their underlying philosophies of learning, the historical evolution and operationalization of SBM in the two projects, and the politics of their SBM implementation.

Departing radically from traditional social learning theories, BEAM's underlying constructivist learning philosophy asserts that higher-order thinking skills are likely to develop in flexible and cooperative learning classroom environments rather than in environments characterized by a one-way transmission of knowledge to passive learners. This explains why BEAM poured a significant share of its resources into capacity building at all levels—teacher educators, teachers, school heads, division and regional personnel—toward learner-centered management and teaching. The shift in learning paradigm that BEAM hopes to achieve entails a more methodical, well-thought, research-based, and fully documented capacity building process. It also requires the development of appropriate (i.e., context-sensitive) learning materials.

In contrast to BEAM's philosophical coherence and consistency, TEEP was less mindful of its learning philosophy. Conceptualized by non-educationists, empirical research on the determinants of desirable student outcomes and the discursive thrust toward decentralization worldwide,

rather than specific learning theories, guided its formulation. This partly explains why TEEP allocated a significant amount of resources for the procurement of inputs such as classrooms and textbooks.

In fact, from 1998 to 2001, TEEP focused primarily on moving its civil works component with equity support from local government units (LGUs). The subsequent flow of resources to education and training was intimately linked with the evolution of SBM in TEEP after 2001. Since then, TEEP practitioners have engaged in the pragmatic search for and adaptation of classroom innovations that worked. The learning philosophy that emerged in the process of implementing TEEP was understandably more eclectic than BEAM. Although the TEEP teachers eventually drew from the constructivist learning theories that guided BEAM, they were not as conscious of the philosophical underpinnings of their practice as their counterparts in BEAM.

With a more eclectic learning philosophy, TEEP training was less methodical than BEAM in planning and implementing reforms. It developed from concrete demands, ranging from the need to supervise classroom construction and procure goods to the more substantive improvement of learning outcomes. The urgency of moving the project even without a full-blown and integrated capacity building plan made TEEP's training processes and procedures, which are largely school-based, more flexible. TEEP practitioners depict their training as a process of "rolling down." This entails adaptation to the terrain through which the training is to be rolled, or the idea of "learning on the run," "action learning," "learning by doing," or "learning by dirtying one's hands."

SBM in BEAM and TEEP

SBM was built into the BEAM project design from the beginning. The project's first stage (2002-2003) included training senior DepEd managers and school heads in the management of learning-centered schools. However, SBM figured more significantly in Stage 2 (2004-2006) when BEAM focused more intently on improving teaching and learning as well as implementing strategies that hope to

Box 2.2 BEAM and TEEP components

Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM)

Component 1: Human Resource Development

- General management training
- In-service teacher training
- Pre-service teacher training
- Assistance for teachers of special groups (e.g., children with special needs, those in multigrade classes, and those from conflict-affected and indigenous communities)
- Capacity building for Muslim education teachers and administrators
- National English Proficiency Program—Mentors Training Program
- Student assessment
- Support for piloting of new strategies to integrate BEAM and other Department of Education initiatives (e.g., Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda, Schools First Initiative) in pilot divisions
- School management

Component 2: Materials Development

- Establishment of materials development centers
- The development and piloting of an Internet-based software tool, the Learning Guide

Component 3: Access

- Support for individual access programs (e.g., community learning centers, early childhood education, accreditation and equivalency, functional literacy-cum-livelihood enterprises development, and distance learning)
- Institute for Indigenous Peoples Education
- Support to madaris to obtain DepEd recognition and accreditation and training of madaris teachers and administrators
- Distance Learning Program
- Development of service providers

Component 4: Project Management, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP)

Component 1: Civil Works

- School building program based on building mapping
- Construction of division offices

Component 2: Education Development

- Student assessment
- Curriculum, instructional materials, and textbooks (CIMTEX)
- In-service training for teachers
- School Improvement Innovative Facility (Demand Side Financing)
- School Improvement Innovative Facility (Supply Side Financing)
- Policy research and strategic planning to support research for education reform
- School-based management

Component 3: Finance and Administration

- Accounting, budget, and finance
- Procurement
- Information, education, communication, and advocacy
- Monitoring, evaluation, and management system

provide children access to quality education. By then the project had supported the intense development of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) involving stakeholders and conducted a slew of capacity building programs for teachers as well as schools, divisions, and regional officials and personnel. It had likewise linked the learning facilitators to each other and produced learning materials in support of the mode of classroom learning SBM is poised to facilitate.

The formulation of SIPs guided by a student-centered, activity-based approach to teaching and learning, and the use of these plans in school management constitute the operationalization of SBM in BEAM. In this regard, the 2008 External Evaluation Report on the project concluded that the SIP process is now established in almost all BEAM schools and the majority of principals are using the SIP in managing their schools [BEAM, 2008a].

In contrast to the clear place of SBM in the BEAM design, SBM developed iteratively in TEEP. It had not come to the full awareness of the project in 1998 although the design document included the category “support to decentralization.” It took the 2001 Midterm Review Team to recommend the inclusion of the SBM component in TEEP.

TEEP experimented with the seminal ideas of EDCOM and Asian Development Bank Technical Assistance on the Decentralization of Basic Education Management (ADB-TAD-BEM) on a large scale—in all the more than 8,600 schools in the 23 TEEP divisions. The development of SBM in TEEP was phenomenal after 2003. Within three years, from January 2003 to June 2006, the number of schools that adopted the principles and practices of SBM expanded exponentially, from the original batch of 396 to more than 8,600.

Like BEAM, the operationalization of SBM in TEEP included (1) the formulation, together with parents, communities, and other stakeholders, of five-year SIPs and corresponding annual implementation plans; and (2) the integration of the procurement of inputs, which included textbooks, and training. TEEP differed from BEAM, however, in its provision of physical inputs (classrooms) and, more importantly, SBM cash grants to schools.

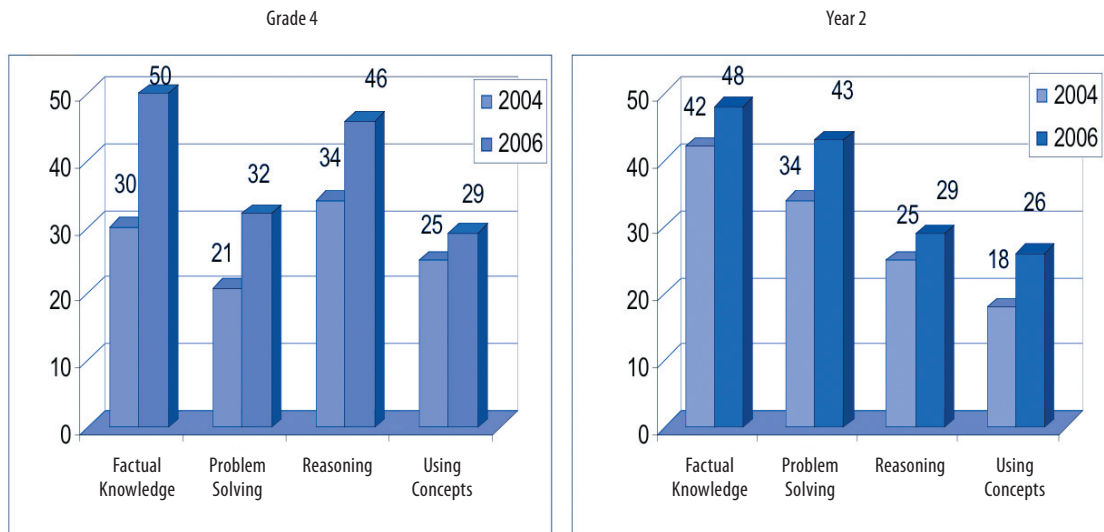
The granting of SBM funds proceeded in four phases, with Elementary Leader Schools and their cluster of satellite schools receiving funds in the first year, deserving depressed and disadvantaged schools receiving funds in the second year, and the remaining schools in the third and fourth years. When the project was completed in 2006, most of the school heads in the 23 divisions had gained experience in handling funds which, for some schools, eventually took the form of the government’s maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE).

Remarkable pupil performance

Regardless of the differences between BEAM and TEEP, both projects had notable effects on pupil performance. Aware of the limitations of existing methods of student assessment, both BEAM and TEEP aspired to go beyond traditional quantitative pen-and-paper measures (e.g., multiple-choice tests) in gauging student performance. The projects developed their own standardized student assessment tests based on the Basic Education Curriculum competencies—RAMSE for BEAM and the National Sample-Based Assessment (NSBA) for TEEP.

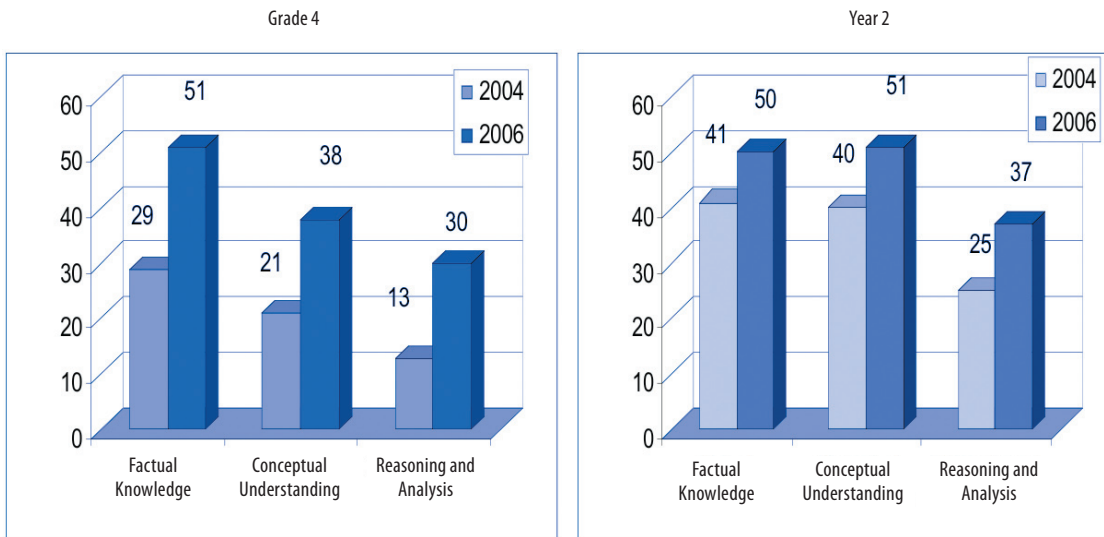
The tests reveal the positive impact of BEAM’s capacity building, classroom interventions, and school management. Although the sample Grade 4 and second year high school students are still performing way below curriculum expectations, the average scores of the learners increased significantly from 2004 to 2006, particularly for items reflecting higher-order thinking skills. The mean percentage scores or MPS for the anchor questions—those asked in all the years—in the math and science items that go beyond factual knowledge improved significantly [**Figures 2.1 and 2.2**] and similarly in English (not shown). The distribution of MPS by type of question further suggests that the learners in BEAM are more able to answer correctly questions that deviate from the usual multiple choice exams they had become accustomed to [**Figure 2.3**].

Figure 2.1 Mean percentage scores of Grade 4 and Y2 students in the anchored items in math in BEAM's RAMSE (2004 and 2006)



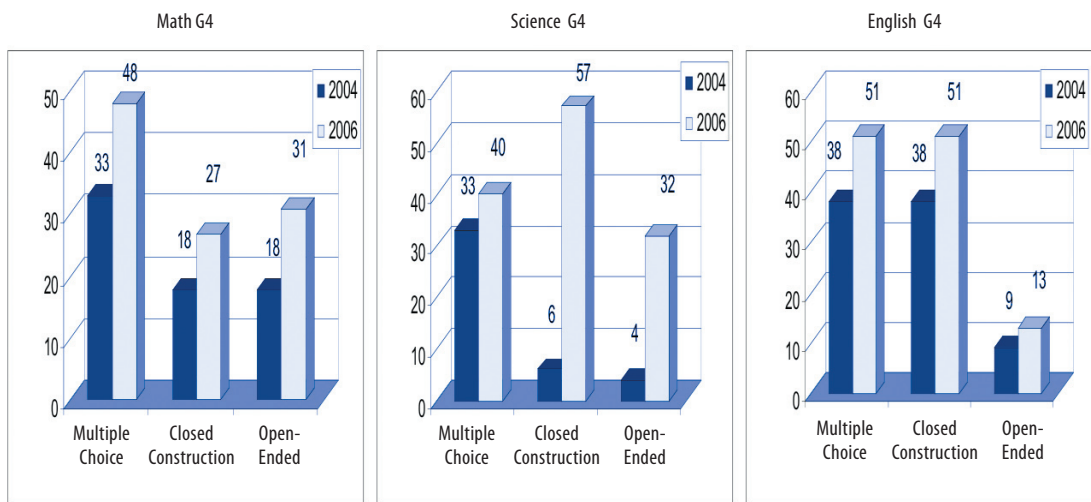
Source: BEAM RAMSE 2007

Figure 2.2 Mean percentage scores of Grade 4 and Y2 students in the anchored items in science in BEAM's RAMSE (2004 and 2006)



Source: BEAM RAMSE 2007

Figure 2.3 Mean percentage scores of Grade 4 pupils in the anchored items in BEAM's RAMSE by type of question (2004 and 2006)



Source: BEAM RAMSE 2007

Further, the RAMSE reports disclose better performance under these conditions:

1. When learners spend less than an hour in getting to school.
2. When teachers sometimes shift to the vernacular in explaining concepts; teach the subjects they specialized in; participate in BEAM in-service training; consult with parents; and use problem solving and investigative projects in science, constructing shapes in math, graphic organizing and journal writings in English, and other learning guides, manuals, or modules.
3. When school administrators monitor and evaluate teachers effectively and efficiently.
4. When schools have adequate facilities.
5. When the community provides sufficient financial and material support.

Like BEAM, TEEP pupils performed well in the project's sample-based assessment. However, unlike RAMSE, the NSBA is not test-equated: It does not have anchor questions. Because the performance of

TEEP pupils is not comparable across the years, the universally administered National Achievement Test (NAT) is a better gauge of the probable impact of SBM in TEEP [JBIC, 2006].

The TEEP divisions that applied SBM, including the management of school funds and related inputs, performed remarkably well toward the end of the project in 2006 when compared with comparator poor and nonpoor division clusters [JBIC, 2006]. A higher proportion of TEEP-SBM schools crossed the 75 percent NAT mean percentage score, the DepEd's desired minimum competency level, and the 60 percent "near mastery" level [Figures 2.4a and 2.4b]. The schools also improved their MPS more significantly than the other division clusters [Figure 2.5]. Figures from 2002 to 2004, when NAT was given to pupils of different grades, are incomparable to those from 2006, but figures for 2005 are.

Significant for addressing equity concerns, multigrade and incomplete TEEP elementary schools, constituting about 24 percent of TEEP schools, were the only ones that registered a positive change in NAT percentile ranks from 2002 to 2006. Small monograde TEEP schools headed by teachers-in-charge (TIC) were also the only ones that improved their NAT rankings from 2002 to 2005, in stark contrast to their counterparts whose ranks slid down

Figure 2.4a Percentage of public elementary schools surpassing 75% level in NAT by division cluster based on overall scores (SY 2002-2003 to SY 2006-2007)

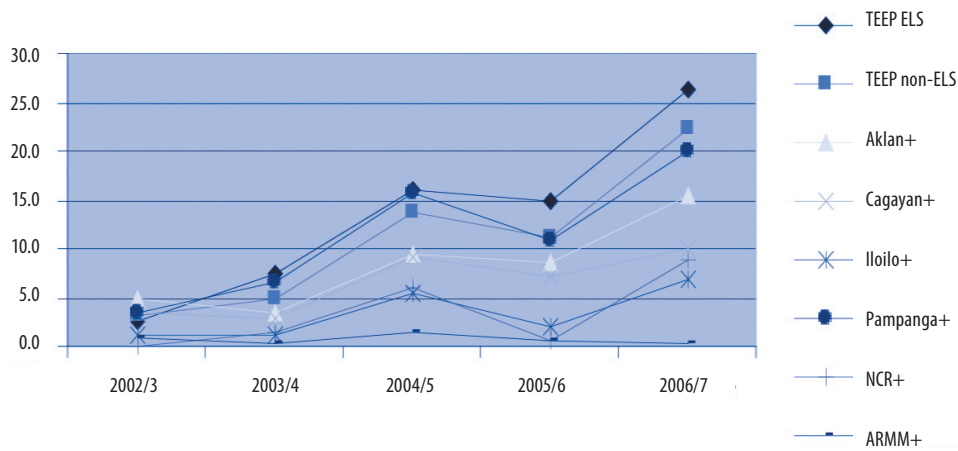


Figure 2.4b Percentage of public elementary schools surpassing 60% level in NAT by division cluster based on overall scores (SY 2002-2003 to SY 2006-2007)

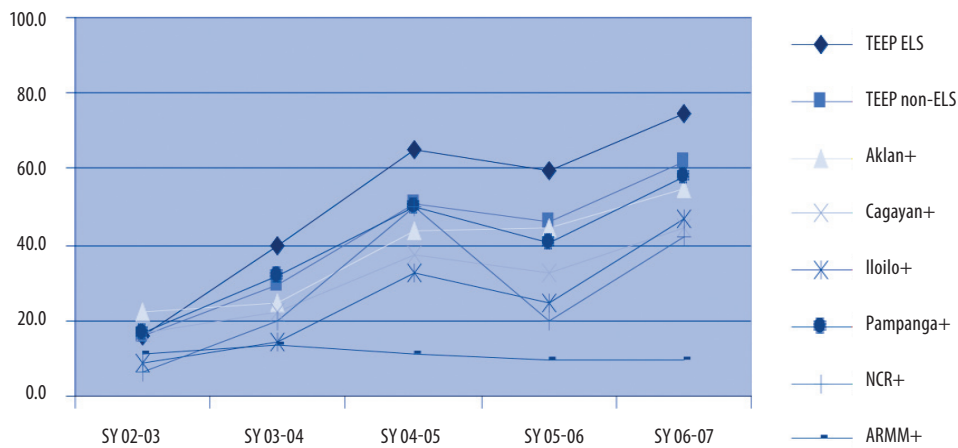
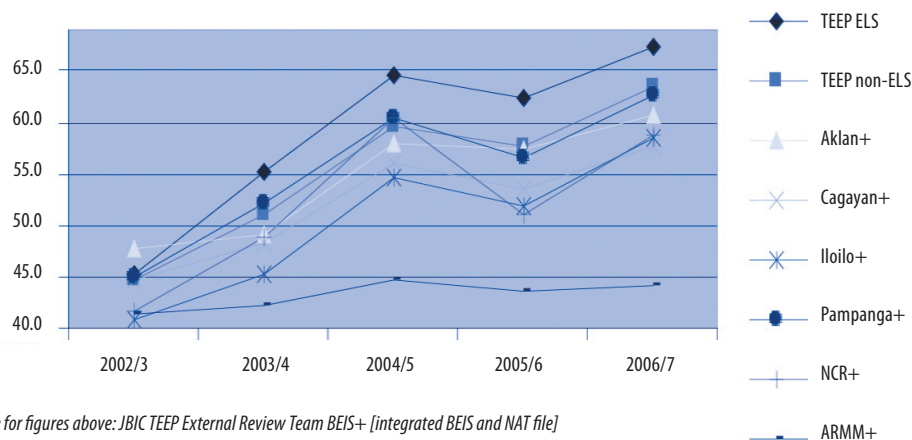


Figure 2.5 Mean percentage scores of public elementary schools in NAT by division cluster based on overall scores ((SY 2002-2003 to SY 2006-2007)



Source for figures above: JBIC TEEP External Review Team BEIS+ [integrated BEIS and NAT file]

for the same period [Figure 2.6]. The performance of small monograde TIC-headed TEEP schools is notable considering that more than half of such schools in the poor division clusters were headed by teachers-in-charge.

Interestingly, TEEP divisions sustained the pattern of improved NAT scores and percentile ranks across all subjects beyond the life of the project at the cost of P806 per pupil per year over eight and a half years [JBIC, 2006]. What accounted for such marked and sustained school improvements?

A regression of the 2004 NAT scores with variables drawn from the 2003 Basic Education Information System (BEIS) dataset revealed that the symbolic value and empowerment connected with managing SBM funds, no matter how small, contributed to the better performance of schools with fully operational SBM (about 62 percent of TEEP schools). Training and community support were the other significant SBM-related determinants of pupil performance in the TEEP divisions.

Veering away from the usual DepEd practice of training only an elite core of trainers who were expected to echo what they learned to others, TEEP training was large-scale, multi-level, and multi-component. All division officials, school heads, and teachers in the 23 schools division went through some formal training, of which the school-based in-service training was the primary focus. However, much of the capacity building in TEEP was informal. It came with the weekly or monthly school learning cells where teachers shared teaching experiences, the actual management of funds, and other day-to-day management and implementation tasks of SBM on all levels.

Changing classroom and management cultures

Both BEAM and TEEP led to significant changes in some aspects of the institutional cultures of the DepEd, at least for the duration of the projects.

BEAM succeeded in changing the competency standards for teachers; advancing the development of student assessment; championing the quality of Muslim education nationwide; and changing the

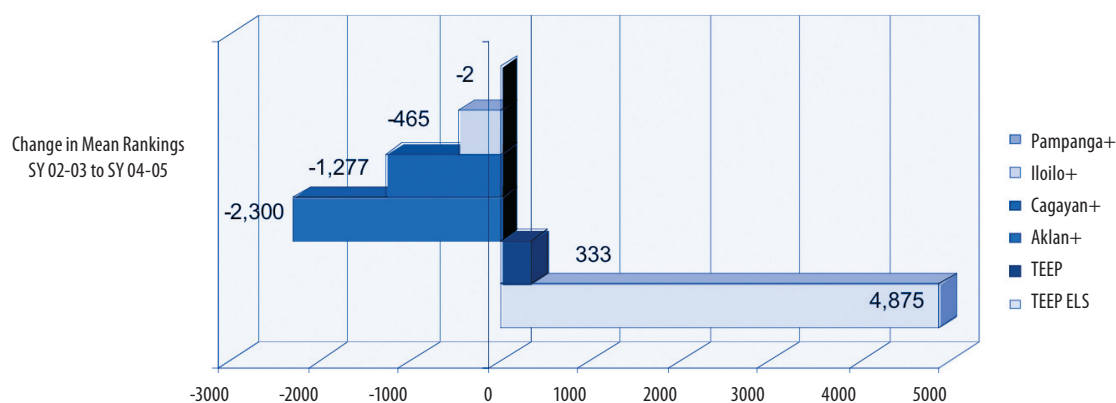
philosophies and mindsets of those within its reach. More importantly, it has directly or indirectly begun to contribute to significant changes at the heart of education—in the culture of the classroom.

The 2008 BEAM Evaluation, for instance, noted that BEAM-trained teachers tended to understand some of the “big ideas” of BEAM better. These “big ideas” refer to themes like higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), multiple intelligences, gender-sensitivity, brain-friendly learning, and varied assessment practices. More BEAM-trained teachers were inclined to say that classrooms should be child-friendly, participative, and stimulating than non-BEAM-trained teachers. As facilitators of learning rather than lecturers, many of them saw their role as encouraging creativity, inquisitiveness, and group activities. The project’s impact is most felt in the wide range of student assessment strategies in BEAM schools.

Transforming public school classrooms into learning environments is a long-term agenda that requires a capacity building infrastructure for each level. With regard to the enabling conditions for effective classroom learning, BEAM has, thus far, been helping administrators develop a more coherent view and understanding of what constitutes quality education. A management training system utilizing appropriate learning systems is now in place for regional, division, district, and school managers. For teachers, BEAM has, among others, set up an effective long-term in-service teacher education (INSET) and nuanced the training of teachers handling Lumad and Muslim children to reflect the special needs of these groups. (Lumad are indigenous peoples in Mindanao.)

TEEP contributions to the management culture of the DepEd are just as significant. In the area of finance management, for instance, TEEP enabled the drilling down of funds from the central office to the divisions and, finally, to schools. This cut the processing time of vouchers and checks between the central office and divisions by two weeks. Almost all TEEP schools eventually managed SBM cash grants from project funds until 2004 and from the regular MOOE that divisions allocated to schools from 2005 up to the end of the project. Also, the project’s finance unit conducted quarterly performance

Figure 2.6 Change in NAT rankings of small monograde teacher-in-charge-headed schools by division type (SY 2002-2003 to SY 2004-2005)



For math, science, and English only. No data for Filipino and HEKASI in SY 2002-2003
 Source: JBICTEEP External Review Team BEIS+ [integrated BEIS and NAT file]

reviews and spot audits of schools and divisions, enforcing incentives which included reallocating unutilized funds to other schools or divisions with a good track record or, in extreme cases where reasons for nonliquidating were unacceptable, withholding salaries of school heads.

One of the effective management innovations that led to good quality performance among division superintendents and project component leaders was the Work and Financial Plan (WFP). TEEP required each component (and division) to prepare an annual plan that specified targets, tasks and activities, budgets, and deadlines. Starting in 2001, these plans were scrutinized for the accuracy of the data on which they were based, their “doability,” and the adequacy of funding support. Once approved, the plans served as “guide” to action. Beyond instilling a culture of planning, the WFP made division superintendents and component heads accountable for accomplishments measured against targets in face-to-face assessments. So effective was the culture of planning and assessment that many superintendents introduced it at the division level.

A discussion of institutional innovations in TEEP would be incomplete without citing its innovations in procurement such as its empirically grounded school-level forecasting to guide the procurement of specialized goods (e.g., customized

kits and furniture); decentralized bidding under Division Bids and Awards Committees; international bidding which reduced the costs in textbook procurement by at least 46 percent; development of 27 designs and specifications for classrooms depending on the terrain and type of natural hazards in the area; and the Principal-led School Building Program (PLSBP).

The PLSBP is worth singling out. This program was probably the tipping point for SBM in the 23 TEEP divisions. In mid-2001, to avoid the threat of loan cancellation because of low loan availment rates, then Secretary Raul Roco, upon the advice of a consulting team with extensive private sector experience in large-scale and field-based nationwide projects, announced an “unmovable” target of 1,000 classrooms in the first six months and another 1,000 in the succeeding six months, and boldly assigned the responsibility of overseeing the bidding and classroom construction within a 90-day cycle to principals. Roco, according to program consultants, asked skeptics: “If you cannot trust the principals in this country, who else can you trust?”

The PLSBP mode produced 1,000 classrooms—some new, some repaired—within the six-month target. Upon inspecting the demonstration units, LGU officials were more eager to come up with the required 10 percent equity. By 2006, some local of-

officials in the TEEP provinces were said to have won or lost elections on the basis of their constituencies' perception of their support to education as indicated by equity provision for new classrooms.

Within the school campuses, the new classrooms became the physical and symbolic catalysts of PTCA (Parent-Teacher-Community Association) and community involvement. In this sense, the PLSBP set the stage for future stakeholder involvement, especially in areas without a history of school-community partnership. On the part of the school heads, the success of the school building program boosted their morale and self-confidence. Suddenly, they were entrusted to manage P500,000 worth of construction. Before the PLSBP, they were only allowed to manage the school canteen income, which was typically P500 to P1,000 per month.

Quo vadis, SBM?

BEAM and TEEP cover all schools in about a fifth of the country's schools divisions. Their scale accounts for their more palpable impact on pupil performance. The institutionalization of SBM and features of both BEAM and TEEP in BESRA, the DepEd's current policy framework for education reform, suggests that the lessons from the experiences of the two projects will not be lost. However, the country's poor track record in translating laws and policies into effective programs and projects raises concerns about the implementation of SBM in BESRA.

The April 2008 aide memoir of the Second World Bank and AusAID Joint Implementation Review to the DepEd Secretary [World Bank, 2008] suggests how far SBM in BESRA has moved since 2006 and the challenges to its implementation.

While the aide memoir acknowledged the overall commitment and involvement of the DepEd managers, staff, and other oversight partners at the national and regional levels to BESRA, it noted that "the depth of engagement was still in the early stages" and observed the limited awareness of BESRA, SBM, and the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards at the school level. It further noted the

slow implementation of DepEd guidelines on the direct release of the MOOE to select elementary and secondary schools, and the release of the 2006 and 2007 SBM school grants. The aide memoir urged the DepEd to "finalize and disseminate guidelines for defining the functions of a school governing structure for guidance of the schools, divisions, and regions; and define and articulate the operationalization of new roles and responsibilities of the Central Office, Regional Office, Division and District Offices and for school heads, consistent with the philosophy of SBM."

Meanwhile, a move to amend the Governance of Basic Education Act (RA 9155) has begun to prosper in Congress. In response to the lobby of district supervisors, the proposed amendment would restore their pre-SBM supervisory powers and prerogatives over school heads. The seeming lack of urgency among officials at the DepEd's central office to articulate their objection to the proposal and the apparent differences in their interpretations of the spirit of SBM suggest the need to level off at the highest echelons of the bureaucracy.

The language policy: Out of sync with research evidence

The unresolved medium of instruction issue in Philippine basic education is a recurring nightmare. Since the 1920s, it has provoked intense and extremely partisan debates. Despite consistent teacher reports on the difficulties of students in learning in English and Filipino, both languages being foreign to many children in the multilingual Philippine context, highly emotional and strong political pressures have been waged for either language for many decades now. In the face of such pressures, policy makers ended up crafting compromise solutions that have not satisfactorily settled the issue.

The prevailing thinking based on international and local research asserts that good language abilities will broker good learning since systems that are already in place in the child's cognitive makeup mediate the learning of a subject matter [Bialystok and Frohlich, 1978; Cummins, 2000; and Mallozzi and Malloy, 2007]. Moreover, studies assert that cognitive academic language proficiency must be reached before a language can be effectively used as a medium of learning and, thus, of instruction (e.g., Cummins, 2000).

Given the sociolinguistic landscape of the Philippines, bilingualism should be in the middle of any discussion on the language issue in education. After all, Filipinos are, at the very least, bilingual. Bilingualism, a term used interchangeably with multilingualism, is the use of two or more languages in a society. Bilingual Filipino children are of two types:

- Those who learn the first language at home (L1) and then acquire additional languages (L2 to Ln) in the social contexts in which they participate.
- Those without a first language, i.e., they are

children immersed in communities and societies with two or more languages perpetually used in their home environments. Therefore, they are bilingual from birth [Ocampo, 2008a].

In both instances, Filipino children acquire their first language/s spontaneously in the process of interacting with their relevant and natural contexts. Once they start schooling, the DepEd's bilingual policy prescribes learning in the two target languages—Filipino and English. It can thus be said that Filipino children acquire about one to two languages spontaneously and, as a result of the bilingual education policy, learn two more languages from school and media exposure [Ocampo, 2006].

Indeed, many children living in Metro Manila spontaneously acquire either English or Filipino from their homes, communities, and the broadcast media. It makes sense for English, Filipino, or both languages to be their medium of learning in the early years. However, most children do not have basic proficiencies in either language when they enter school. Using these languages for instruction in the early years may have impeded their effective learning both of the two languages and of the subject matter presumably taught in them [Ocampo, 1996; Aquino, 2007].

Understanding the relationships between (1) bilingualism and biliteracy, (2) first and second language mastery, and (3) first and second language reading has direct bearing on the process of teaching children how to read. Because teacher education curricula do not explicitly include the development of second language ability and literacy, Filipino teachers, until recently, were trained to think that literacy develops in the same way in any language. This thinking ignores observed differences in literacy acquisition depending on the spelling or orthographic system used to represent the language in print, and the literacy practices or events in which literacy is expected to develop [Katz and Frost, 1992; Geva and Siegel, 2000; and Smythe et al., 2008]. It also overlooks the finding that literacy skills develop more easily and efficiently when built on the child's prior knowledge of the language [Andoy, 2006; Cummins, 2000; and Ocampo, 1996].

The insights from such studies have not been integrated into the country's basic education program for language and literacy development. Up to now, the school curriculum does not build upon oral language ability in the first language. Instead, it immediately teaches children to read in the two target languages of the curriculum. This ignores the strength of first language literacy contributions to mastery of the target language/s and to literacy development in additional languages. This is most especially true for the early years when such abilities are starting to form and grow.

Another equally important language-related component of learning is motivation. Language use in the schools impacts on the affective side of learning. Not only is it cognitively harder to learn to read and write in an unfamiliar language, children who are made to read in a language they do not understand oftentimes feel marginalized from classrooms that are supposed to liberate their minds.

For the last 30 years, the Philippines' highest dropout rate in the elementary level is reported to be in Grade 2. This suggests that difficulties in engaging with school activities and lessons may have been aggravated by the inability of young children to cope with the language learning requirements. In other words, children may have lost motivation to attend school because they could have experienced failure in reading and writing in Filipino and English.

For over 80 years, the recommendation to use the native [Monroe Survey, 1925], local [EDCOM, 1991], mother [PCER, 2000], or the child's [BESRA, 2006] language as the medium of learning in the early years has been consistently disregarded. From the 1920s to the present, the political pressures exerted by different sectors and advocates in the name of national unification, global participation, regional identity, cultural integrity, economic progress, or overseas employment have caused the policy decision-making on the language issue to swing from one extreme to another [Bernardo 2004; Bernardo and Gaerlan, in press]. After such swings, the pendulum stopped dead center in 1973, resulting in the poorly formulated and unrevised Bilingual Education Policy (BEP).

This compromise policy, embodied in the Department of Education and Culture (DEC) Order No. 25, s. 1973, operationally defines the nature of bilingual education in the country as the separate use of Pilipino and English as the media of instruction in specific subject areas. As promulgated, Pilipino (changed to Filipino in 1987) was the designated medium of instruction for social studies, music, arts, physical education, home economics, practical arts, and character education. English, on the other hand, was decreed the teaching language for science, mathematics, and technology subjects. The same language allocation by subject is provided in the 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education disseminated through Department Order No. 52, s. 1987.

Bilingual incompetence

Where has the Bilingual Education Policy brought the country?

This question is best answered by studying the performance of schoolchildren in all the subject areas of the curriculum over the last 30 years and correlating these with implementation assessments of the BEP. Unfortunately, longitudinal data based on stable product assessments of student learning are not available. Thus, Gonzalez and Sibayan [1998], who evaluated the impact of BEP implementation on student achievement, were unable to establish the significant effect of the BEP. They concluded instead that providing favorable learning environments, teacher preparation or competencies, and optimal teacher-student ratios, among other factors, contribute to improved language and literacy learning.

Nonetheless, the fact that achievement in both English and Filipino has been low for more than two decades suggests that the BEP is not being implemented well enough to result in proficiency in both languages. Perhaps the strongest proof of the BEP's failure is the observed profile of teachers currently implementing the policy who were themselves students during its initial implementation. It is this younger set of teachers who have been reported as greatly deficient in their

English language skills.

What has kept the DepEd as an institution from developing bilingual competence among Filipino children as well as their competence to learn through these two languages?

First, the DepEd formulated a weak policy on bilingual education that does not stand on strong theoretical grounds. It ignored the long-standing and empirically validated view of how learning best happens among children [Harris, 1979] and how new language learning should be built upon a mastery of the child's native or mother language [Gudschinsky, 1979]. Furthermore, the policy glossed over the sociocultural issues in education by relegating the local languages as auxiliary mediums of instruction which teachers can use informally. The reported bias of some teachers, being members of (regional) linguistic communities, against the BEP might have also undermined its effectiveness [Castillo, 1999].

Second, the DepEd surrendered the power to decide on the language of schools rather than advocate research-based policy. It relinquished control over the curriculum and its content decades ago to politicians (in Congress or in the Office of the President). At present, the DepEd waits for directives from the Office of the President, legislators, or donors. With the promise of employment for Filipinos in the call center industry/resource management sector, the Arroyo administration is aggressively championing the use of English as the medium of instruction in schools. In addition, more than 200 congressional representatives have signed House Bill No. 4701, which seeks to make English the medium of instruction from Grade 3 onwards with Filipino taught only as a subject. Opposing this bill is House Bill No. 3719, which espouses the use of the mother tongue throughout elementary education [Box 2.3].

The control of politicians over the language of instruction contrasts sharply with the situation in 1939 when the education secretary decided on the issue because of its curricular significance for learning. In 1957, the Revised Philippine Education

Program, which was based on a research by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), implemented the use of the local languages in Grades 1 and 2 while English was taught as a subject. This was one of the rare times when research conclusions—particularly the finding of the Aguilar Experiment conducted from 1948 to 1954, that all subjects, including English, were learned better when children were first taught in their mother tongue [Harris, 1979]—guided education policy.

Third, exacerbating the loss of efficacy in determining the language policy is a seeming lack of serious effort on the part of the DepEd to explain the crucial role of language to policy makers. Unaware of what language will best enable children to learn, those charged with deciding how education is to be delivered to the country's future generation have relied solely on employment growth paradigms in deciding on the language of education, ignoring the widely accepted research findings on culture, learning, and child development. Emphasis on global competitiveness and the dollars brought in by overseas employment has made those responsible for the education of the nation's children inadvertently adopt an erroneous view of the learning process. Instead of forging paths out of poverty and unemployment, poor education policy on languages of learning has made schooling more difficult for children and, thus, less effective in achieving education goals.

Finally, the DepEd has yet to negotiate a shift from structural learning paradigms to more socio-constructivist methods of teaching and assessing language and literacy learning. This, despite the adoption of national competency-based standards for teachers that are aligned with the new paradigm and the experiences of projects like BEAM. Teachers narrate that lessons continue to be taught by rote, with emphasis on codes or structural aspects [Diaz de Rivera, 1994; Castillo, 1999; and Asian Development Bank, 1999]. Part of the reason for the failure to shift paradigms is a lack of appreciation of the need to make such a shift.

Box 2.3 Salient features of various recommendations on the medium of instruction in schools

	Mother Tongue/ Child's Language	Filipino	English	Other Philippine/ Foreign Languages
Bilingual Education Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Auxiliary language of instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards ■ Medium of instruction for MAKABAYAN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards ■ Medium of instruction for math and science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ none
House Bill No. 4701 (The Gullas Bill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Optional medium of instruction until Grade 2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards ■ Medium of instruction from Grade 1 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ none
House Bill No. 3719 (The Gunigundo Bill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Medium of instruction up to Grade 6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ none
Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Medium of instruction until Grade 2 ■ Formal literacy instruction starting at preschool (Kindergarten) or Grade 1 ■ Auxiliary language of instruction from Grade 4 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards ■ Formal literacy instruction starting at Grade 2 ■ Medium of instruction for MAKABAYAN from Grade 3 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Subject from Grade 1 onwards ■ Formal literacy instruction starting at Grade 3 ■ Medium of instruction for math and science from Grade 4 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Oral language development in Arabic (for madaris or Muslim schools) from Grade 1 onwards ■ Literacy in Arabic (for madaris) from Grade 4 onwards ■ Arabic as medium of instruction for an elective or special subject in madaris from first year high school onwards ■ Philippine regional/foreign language elective for students from third year high school onwards

Institutional factors that hinder reform initiatives

Apart from substantive theoretical issues, what institutional factors have kept the DepEd from shifting paradigms or scaling up successful reform initiatives like SBM?

Externally induced reform

The DepEd's almost absolute dependence on the implementation of foreign-assisted programs that have reform activities built into pilot project components was clearly discernible in the last 20 years.

Thus, it seems that reform activities were undertaken only as the DepEd moved from one foreign-assisted program to another.

In the last 20 years, foreign donor agencies (AusAID, JBIC, WB, ADB) did not only fund these projects, they also initiated, nurtured, monitored, and saw them through their completion. Externally driven, the reform projects raise concern over the DepEd's institutional capacity to eventually initiate and sustain them.

More than apprehension over the department's financial wherewithal to support such projects, however, is the question whether the DepEd has a critical mass of institutional actors and enough space within its bureaucratic culture to introduce new ideas into its practices and policies. A highly centralized and hierarchical institution like the

DepEd, which has some deeply entrenched practices, may have neither the means nor the incentive to conceive of alternative educational principles, creative processes, and resourceful practices to the status quo. Of course, there have been many experienced and insightful DepEd officials and staff with reformist philosophical orientations and a deep sense of mission. However, their position in the DepEd's hierarchical bureaucracy and the multiple day-to-day demands on their time have rendered them powerless to reform even the practices and mindsets within their turfs.

The pilot project mindset

The DepEd's manner of undertaking reform is to projectize it, and its idea of projectization is to pilot test the efficacy of reformist interventions on a limited scale so as not to risk failure in large-scale implementation. The idea of using pilot projects in the process of education reform involves the introduction of an intervention into an existing system, without attempting to fully control the range of other variables operating within the context, then observing whether significant improvements can be measured soon after the intervention is completed. Reinforcing this quasi-experimental approach to education reform is the myth that large-scale change can be comprehended by understanding what happens on a very small scale.

The pilot project mentality is deeply ingrained in the DepEd bureaucracy. Its pervasiveness is underscored by the taken-for-granted assumption that pilot testing is required by the need to deliver a uniform or one-size-fits-all education to Filipino learners across the archipelago, regardless of differences in their sociocultural and political economic environments. Uniformity from this viewpoint is conflated with maintaining academic standards.

An important institutional consequence of this conflation is the privileged role of the DepEd central office in defining the standards—common curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, learning materials, and system of quality assurance and assessment—and transmitting them to the schools through the regional, schools division, and district

offices. Culturally sensitive curricula, approaches, and materials that deviate from the standard would be discouraged in theory, even if they enhance the acquisition of learning competencies, unless the central office stamps its approval on their quality and usefulness.

Interestingly, though, the uniform application of pilot-tested reform initiatives to diverse learning contexts has rarely happened. Because education reform has been undertaken through discrete and donor-initiated projects, the DepEd has not fully graduated from pilot testing reform interventions on a limited number of pilot schools to its presumed second phase—the scaling up and uniform implementation of the reform. Not until BEAM and TEEP did the DepEd conduct an experiment covering all schools in more than 40 divisions.

The unprecedented BEAM and TEEP experiment effectively challenged the DepEd's assumptions about education reform. For instance, the department has begun to understand that education reform experiments require scale—tens of thousands of schools in contiguous geographic areas rather than a few hundred scattered across provinces—to make a difference. The DepEd has also slowly realized that any reform initiative, no matter how effective in particular areas of the country, cannot be cascaded down uniformly to schools. In fact, the department has adopted the phrase “rolling down” to describe the adaptation of interventions to different terrains. It has also begun to discover the wisdom of enabling experiments that allow schools to choose appropriate materials and strategies that would enhance their learning environments. In fine, the DepEd is evolving.

Having critiqued the notion of piloted or projectized reform, it is important to qualify that there is nothing inherently wrong with treating the conceptualization and implementation of particular reform interventions as projects. In fact, this might be the way to focus the attention of units within the DepEd to achieve particular performance outcomes. Projectization becomes problematic, however, when scaling up or sustaining reform is not undertaken without external prodding and when the bearers of institutional reform in the bureaucracy

no longer vigorously exert efforts to sustain reform gains after meeting project targets.

Reform projects at the margins of DepEd

The task of instituting new ideas from pilot projects within the bureaucracy is particularly challenging because most of the donor-initiated reform projects are administered within the DepEd but outside its main line of operations. In truth, most of the projects in Box 2.1 were handled by a specially designated DepEd office—the Educational Project Implementation Task Force or EDPITAF, which has its own internal project staff and external consultants. Other DepEd offices (at the central, regional, and division levels) may be involved in specific project activities, but only when needed and with explicit instructions through a department order. As a consequence, the reform projects remain peripheral to the operation of the DepEd bureaucracy throughout their implementation.

Given this scenario, it is not easy for key components of the reform projects to be assimilated into DepEd practices. The difficulty is aggravated by the negative sentiments of DepEd insiders toward the projects, their consultants, and contractual project staff. There seems to be a widespread view among staff members that the pilot projects are pursued primarily for the huge financial resources they bring to the DepEd. They view with much skepticism the participation of highly paid consultants, some of whom are perceived to lack grounding in DepEd realities and the “proper” motivation to reform education. It does not help that the perceived financial support given to regular DepEd staff members in the form of Employee Extra Duty Allowance and per diem reinforces the cynical outlook of uninvolved officials and members of the DepEd bureaucracy.

Waged at the margins of the DepEd operations, the donor-initiated and projectized nature of education reform have ostensibly prevented the department from orchestrating or directing the reform process. The DepEd does not seem resolute, for instance, to take on the responsibility of process-

ing the experiences and outcomes of every reform project it approves, drawing their implications for a long-term reform agenda, and carrying out changes in reform goals and strategies if warranted. Instead, it seems to have simply moved from one project to the next, with little or no effort to harmonize or interrelate project outcomes that would enable it to avoid overlaps and resource wastage, promote policy and pedagogical consistency, and connect with wider social reform initiatives.

Despite this tendency, there have been many instances when certain reform features migrate to subsequent projects because of individual DepEd personnel who carry over the reform principles and practices to the new projects they are asked to work with. While this has been a positive development, it does not mean that the DepEd has institutionalized such principles and practices. When their bearers are given assignments that no longer directly relate to reform, their advocacies are likely to be relegated to oblivion. With the loss of institutional memory, subsequent donor-initiated projects would probably waste precious time reinventing wheels that had worked well for similarly situated reform projects in the past.

Untapped project lessons for setting policy directions

The final reports or midterm assessments of reformist frameworks and projects like BEAM and TEEP usually analyze their strengths and weaknesses. The question is whether the DepEd has an institutionalized system of processing project outcomes and their implications for reforms in the public school system.

In theory, the implications of the BEAM and TEEP experience should have been assessed by the Research, Innovation and Policy Evaluation System (RIPES) that the DepEd created in 2003 to rationalize decision-making in the area of research and innovation and their utilization. After all, RIPES is mandated to expand the roles of the Executive and Program Committee of the department and serve as clearing house for its research and innovation activities. Unfortunately, the RIPES Secretariat, which

was lodged in the Planning and Programming Division of the Office of the Planning Service, was later transferred to the DepEd Special Concerns Office under the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legal Affairs. This move weakened the policy research unit within the DepEd considerably even before it could operate effectively.

Had RIPES been operational, it could have proposed a plan on how to more effectively decentralize education through SBM on a national scale. More particularly, it could have processed the following observations to refine the DepEd's organizational policy in this regard.

Within the framework of decentralization, BEAM and TEEP worked through different layers of the bureaucracy. BEAM operated through the regional offices of Regions XI, XII, and ARMM. Working primarily through this level facilitated the remarkable changes in classroom philosophy, organization, and culture in many BEAM schools and promised to ensure the sustainability of the project's contributions in a hierarchical system where power is still concentrated in the regional and central offices.

In contrast, TEEP bypassed the regional offices (while emphasizing their role in quality assurance) and made the divisions directly responsible for SBM implementation and the provision of support to schools. This decision was guided in part by a study commissioned by the project [Center for Public Resource Management, 2002], which observed that the division office has a comparative advantage over the region because it strikes a balance between geographical coverage that reflects local conditions and the cost of upgrading capacities for resource generation and management.

The TEEP experience affirms the wisdom of lodging decentralization in the schools divisions rather than the regional offices. Empirically, TEEP schools with strong division support showed more significant and sustained improvements in NAT scores than those with less supportive divisions [Bautista, 2005]. That the performance of BEAM divisions, with the exception of North Cotabato (which also happens to be a TEEP division), has not been at par with TEEP and the other poor and nonpoor

division clusters suggests a number of possibilities. One is that NAT and better quality assessments like BEAM's RAMSE are completely incompatible (therefore the need to shift to another universal metric). It is also quite likely that the schools BEAM covered did not receive the regular encouragement and follow-up division support—including regular face-to-face work planning meetings and the granting of incentives for good performance—that spelled the difference for the TEEP schools.

For whatever its worth, the NAT result in the BEAM divisions underscores the importance of tapping into the potential synergy of the BEAM and TEEP strategies. Admittedly, BEAM's philosophy is necessary for long-term and sustained effects on classroom learning and performance outcomes. However, TEEP's SBM strategies would, in all likelihood, hasten the reform process when SBM is scaled up nationally. Metaphorically, BEAM's valuable interventions would have had a higher probability of rooting faster had TEEP's division-mediated SBM been used to till the soil. In other words, the TEEP SBM model, which gives premium to strong schools division support, is a good preliminary or simultaneous strategy for shaking prevailing systems and inducing education stakeholders at the school level, to open up to the much-needed shifts in learning paradigms that the BEAM model strongly advocates.

Constraints beyond DepEd's control

Education reform is not completely within the control of the DepEd, however. Apart from Congress and the Office of the President, other agencies like the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the Commission on Audit (COA), and local government units (LGUs) have affected the education reform process as well. For instance, the mismatch between the DBM and DepEd budget cycles results in delayed releases of DepEd allocations, adversely affecting reform-oriented projects [Luz, 2008]. Take the case of TEEP. The release of the remaining 25 percent of the 2005 budget allocation in the first quarter of 2006, led to the non-issuance of contracts

for much-needed works that should have been covered by this fund balance.

The COA for its part has a double-edged effect on the DepEd's reformist interventions. On the one hand, it serves as a good antidote to corruption. On the other hand, the COA might have also unknowingly hindered or slackened the pace of the reform process. In the TEEP experience, the COA disallowed the advances the project made to LGUs to speed up the school building constructions, which, unfortunately, were not honored by subsequent politicians. Fear of such disallowances, whether warranted or not, has unwittingly contributed to the DepEd officials' preference for autopiloting rather than engaging in a reformist mode.

Like the COA, the LGUs have a nuanced effect on education reform. The experiences of BEAM, TEEP, and NGOs like Synergeia reveal their potential contribution in pushing reform measures in geographic areas led by LGU officials who are committed to the delivery of basic services. Where local officials were progressive, TEEP schools flourished. Similarly, in places covered by Synergeia, Local School Boards chaired by the local chief executive had a greater likelihood of addressing access and quality issues.

It is unfortunate, however, that the efforts of the very few reform-minded LGU heads are severely undermined when the guards change with elections. It is also regrettable that enlightened LGU executives do not yet constitute a majority at this time. In some TEEP municipalities, mayors from deeply seated political clans stood in the way of reform simply by throwing their weight around. Some local officials also meddled directly in civil works projects. TEEP experienced, for instance, local executives who insisted on selecting particular school building contractors without the usual bidding.

The uneven maturity of LGUs in terms of democratic governance brings to the fore the issue of the form decentralization should eventually take in education [JBIC, 2006]. At least two models exist—the devolution to LGUs and the decentralization of management within the state's education bureaucracy, from central offices to the schools. As in Central America, the Philippine model has taken

the second form.

Interestingly, the concept of the School Governing Council (SGC) or Local School Board (LSB), chaired by the local chief executive, bridges the devolution model that puts the onus of providing basic education on the shoulders of LGUs and the current decentralization mode that devolves power from the DepEd central office to the schools. But in the face of uneven LGU political maturity, the TEEP experience offers an interim solution. In compliance with the provisions of then Secretary Florencio Abad's *Schools First Initiative (SFI)* to set up SGCs or LSBs, division superintendents in politicized areas supported the setting up of the councils but allowed for flexibility in the choice of chairs. The SGCs or LSBs were not necessarily chaired by the local chief executive but by the PTCA president, an NGO representative, or the school head, depending on the preference of the body that elects the council officials.

Policy covers, policy continuity and leadership: Do they matter?

Education reform requires appropriate policy covers and continuity over time. RA 9155 provided the impetus for the development of SBM. To its credit, the DepEd demonstrated policy continuity as far as SBM is concerned—from the lobby for the passage of RA 9155 to the stipulation of its internal rules and regulations, down to the implementation of SBM and its eventual integration into BESRA. This is remarkable indeed, considering the impulse of Filipino government leaders to reinvent the wheel for the sake of a legacy that will be associated with them. It is also significant in light of the DepEd's past record of having two education secretaries who derailed a reform agenda as major as EDCOM.

As far as the language issue is concerned, however, the DepEd has not demonstrated the resolve to review the bilingual policy despite overwhelming research evidence for its revision. Thus, as noted earlier, the department virtually left policy making on this issue to politicians. The DepEd's reluctance to revise the bilingual policy may not be due solely to its concern with the political controversy generated by such a

review. Rather, some of its officials and staff, like other education advocates, are themselves unconvinced. Lack of awareness of scientific evidence on cognitive processes and the increasing universality of the English language with globalization seem to have clouded their view on this matter [Bernardo, 2004; 2008].

Policy continuity is important, but it is not enough. While the appropriate policy and its continuity across the DepEd administrations are necessary for reform, they are not sufficient to bring it about. If reform is to take place, policies—which are but abstract guidelines on paper—must be operationalized and implemented resolutely. However, policy implementation is constrained when the institution is resistant to reform. For instance, the seeming reluctance of the DepEd to scale up a division-mediated SBM and the seemingly equivocal position of its officials on legislative proposals to restore the prerogatives of district supervisors over school heads suggest the capacity of interest groups within the bureaucracy to wage an effective resistance to the implementation of a legislated policy.

Top leadership matters; changing secretaries too often constrains reform. In the two instances of the language issue and decentralization, leadership at the highest level of the DepEd bureaucracy was crucial to break the impasse either in policy revision or the implementation of existing policy. However, the rapid succession of the DepEd's top leaders—six secretaries in eight years since 2000!—has left very little time for the theoretical and empirical arguments surrounding the language issue to sink in. Unfortunately, it has also broken the momentum of decentralization. In every transition from one DepEd secretary to the next, the organic staff would “wait and see” to assess if expending energy on decentralization and SBM is worth it.

The DepEd secretary has the power to push the bureaucracy to prioritize the implementation of a reform agenda. For instance, the groundwork for SBM was laid quickly without being thwarted by internal resistance to decentralization when Roco indicated his personal resolve to make TEEP move through the divisions. Similarly, SBM flour-

ished under Abad. Abad even managed to get the Department of Public Works and Highways' share of the school building funds for the DepEd to manage under the principal-led construction mode.

But involvement of the highest official in the DepEd is a double-edged sword in a regime of projectized and disjointed reform. Roco's direct involvement in TEEP is a case in point. It made the project more susceptible to the politics within the DepEd. After Roco's administration, even while SBM under TEEP was blossoming, its achievements seemed to have been underestimated partly because the project was associated with Roco. In a sense, TEEP became a virtual orphan after Roco, an exception to the common belief that success has many mothers and fathers.

In contrast to TEEP, BEAM seems to have been less affected by the central politics of the DepEd. In fact, its contributions are widely recognized and hailed by the DepEd's officialdom at all levels. Apart from its remarkable achievements and the inherent value of its contributions, the reasons behind BEAM's acceptability are instructive.

First, BEAM was supported by a grant rather than a loan. Second, it focused on the substance of education reform—learning in the classroom—relegating potentially controversial and politically contentious civil works projects to minimal priority. Third, BEAM's leader, who personally projects deep commitment and missionary zeal, is an Australian who has managed to protect the project from being associated with any DepEd official while maintaining collaborative links with central, regional, and division DepEd personnel. Fourth, regional directors, superintendents, selected educators, and other high DepEd officials saw for themselves how these programs worked in Australian schools during BEAM study tours. Fifth, BEAM operated through the regional office and, therefore, had less powerful enemies to contend with. Finally, BEAM's programs focused on Mindanao and were far from the center. Moreover, the central office valued BEAM's contributions to teacher and madrasah education nationwide.

The DepEd's top leadership matters, but it is equally important to have a strong second

layer of career executives. DepEd secretaries usually have priority program thrusts that differ from what the DepEd as an institution is committed to do. In such a situation, the onus for sustaining previous reform efforts should fall on the undersecretaries and assistant secretaries, preferably career executives who understand institutional imperatives. Several factors, however, would prevent this from happening: the replacement of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries with new appointees because they serve in a coterminous capacity with the DepEd secretary; their inability to mobilize colleagues and subordinates because they do not have the track record to gain respect; they do not have the energy to push changes; they do not have the support of the secretary; or they are unable to communicate or coordinate with their colleagues in the DepEd officialdom.

Leadership at the division and school levels is clearly more important for effective policy implementation as long as the central offices do not put obstacles in the way.

Although the personal support of the DepEd's top leaders is crucial in pushing reform, the TEEP experience also reveals that leadership at the division and school levels is even more important for effective policy implementation. Despite its marginalized status vis-à-vis the DepEd central office, SBM in TEEP prospered because of the leadership of division superintendents and supportive district supervisors. In fact, there is now a critical mass of such leaders at the division and district offices who are capable of taking charge of SBM implementation in other division clusters.

Two points are worth noting with regard to leadership on the ground. First, division superintendents are effective only if they are selected on the basis of their professional capabilities. Second, in the context of SBM and decentralization, it is even more crucial for school heads, whether they be principals, head teachers, or teachers-in-charge, to possess the capacity and sense of mission that classroom reforms demand. The BEAM and TEEP experience attests to many heroic school leaders who have turned the dismal situation of their schools around [TEEP-DepEd, 2005]. Yet, for every

excellent instructional leader and school manager, many more school heads who are either ineligible for the post, have had no formal training, or are too engrossed with credentialing in a system that privileges degrees over performance constrain classroom reform [Luz, 2008].

Cultural barriers

In addition to structural and leadership issues, informal constraints exacerbate the DepEd's difficulty to pursue and sustain education reform.

Inertia and resistance to change. As with other bureaucracies, resistance to institutional change appears to be the rule in the DepEd. The issue of language in teaching and in learning (discussed earlier) illustrates this point.

The DepEd's inertia and general resistance to change is also apparent in its unwillingness to adopt approaches, processes, and procedures that worked effectively in reform projects. By way of illustration, TEEP managed to change the system of budget allocation for elementary schools in the course of its implementation. The project required division superintendents to submit school-by-school accounting of the division funds and material goods delivered to schools from their offices. In contrast, the "traditional" DepEd finance system allowed division superintendents much flexibility but did not require an accounting (not even after the fact) of how much of their budget was allocated for particular elementary schools. Budgetary discretion in this regard has led to the ludicrous purchase, in some instances, of goods that schools do not need at all (e.g., 100 dictionaries for small schools). Unfortunately, this prudent practice TEEP introduced was not sustained.

More regrettable was the curtain call on the drilling down to schools of cash allocations (rather than equivalent goods). This happened even before the practice was voluntarily adopted by all 23 division superintendents. It is interesting that while they agreed to do so in principle, only five division superintendents at project end drilled down the division's MOOE budget to elementary schools based on a formula that privileged the disadvantaged

schools in the division. This was perhaps one policy that superintendents found very difficult to implement, and those who did were commendable for letting go of a major source of power and discretion. It is unfortunate that some of the divisions that drilled down cash earlier have had great difficulty in sustaining the devolution of financial power to schools. The DepEd's universal implementation of this policy under BESRA in the latter half of 2008 was thus starting nearly from scratch rather than building on the TEEP experience.

Reverting to old practices at the end of project life reflects the DepEd's resistance to scaling up changes that work. The inertia of such resistance is rooted in the bureaucracy's prevailing power structure. The division superintendents' decision to renege on their commitment to drill down cash to schools, for instance, or the regional directors' reaction to the drilling down of funds to the divisions illustrates the very real problem of devolving the power of the purse. At the end of the day, the DepEd officials at the central, regional, division, and district levels fear losing control when the hierarchical culture of the DepEd is undermined by the decentralization reform thrust.

Culture of obeisance. Thirty years ago, the late University of the Philippines professor Priscilla Manalang provided snippets of a prevalent culture that survives to this day:

In response to bureau demands, much of the teacher's time was spent in filling out forms and drafting reports to be submitted on specified deadlines. Prior to SY1979-1980, more than 100 reports were expected of the school heads at the end of the school year...whole days were occupied with working on statistics required at short notice...Because there were no office personnel, teachers themselves acted as clerks and typists...On other days...related to their duty was the serving of refreshments or meals to important visitors such as district supervisors and other school officials...teachers even prepare food in the kitchen [Manalang, 1977: 88, 119].

The so-called school "observation visitations" of the higher-ups do not only engage teachers in the choice of gifts for the guests to bring home but also in preparing pupils during class hours to welcome the important visitors.

Socialized in this deferential culture, teachers hardly complain about the multiple tasks they are made to perform outside their primary teaching duty. Nor are they wont to express their concerns to higher authorities. Similarly, school heads, division superintendents, and regional directors, no matter how outspoken, would defer to those above them even if they are more experienced or knowledgeable on an issue.

The culture of obeisance is shored up by tacitly accepted sanctions for disobedience in the bureaucracy. These range from formal punishments—poor performance ratings, delayed promotions, or the threats of a COA disallowance or potential administrative cases—to informal penalties that include withdrawal of privileges, assignment of insufferable or even hazardous tasks, or reassignment to a less preferred unit.

Aside from undermining initiative and resourcefulness within the bureaucracy, the culture of obeisance is linked to the apparent tolerance for wrongdoing in the DepEd (as well as other government agencies in the Philippines). This culture seems to go hand in hand with employees and lower echelon officials turning the other way when faced with misdemeanor in public office, cheating, and generally corrupt practices. Expressing disagreements or taking an ethical stance to correct wrong actions is deemed too inconvenient and risky to one's job or career.

As far as education reform is concerned, the culture of obeisance has another downside that is associated with an otherwise welcome premise—that the human agency of individuals operating at the lowest rung of the bureaucracy cannot be fully eroded, no matter how controlling the bureaucratic structures and processes. The downside is staff resistance to changes affecting normal operations that are imposed from above. This resistance, which morphs into a "weapon of the weak" [Scott, 1987], has the power to undermine reformist initiatives. Even at higher levels of the bureaucracy, bureau

directors can quietly resist changes introduced by their superiors, especially if these are proposed by outside technical consultants.

Minimal compliance to program or project implementation highlights the paradox of the DepEd as a weak institution as far as pushing education reform is concerned and a strong institution in resisting and sustaining much-needed change.

Rethinking the projectization of reform

Transforming the DepEd from a coping and reform-resistant institution into a dynamic and reformist one is its major challenge at this juncture. What will it take to infuse the bureaucracy with the fervor of a reform movement in response to the never-ending lamentations about the deterioration of Philippine basic education?

At first blush, this is almost asking for the moon. However, the BEAM and TEEP experience in more than 40 divisions shows that such movement-like fervor can be approximated without necessarily changing guards. Unfortunately, the passion for change has risen or fallen with the project life cycle. The palpable spirit of ground-level reform in TEEP, for instance, appears to have waned after the completion of the project, supporting the view of skeptical reformists within and outside the DepEd that the institution has no means to carry out reform other than through disjointed externally initiated projects. Hopefully, this is no longer the case.

The Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda

In 2006, the DepEd formulated the Basic Education Reform Agenda (BESRA) and has since forged consensus among different stakeholders on its implementation. BESRA is a comprehensive and sector-wide reform package that is remarkable in many respects.

First, it aims to change the entire sector, and not just specific target sites for pilot implementation. BESRA, thus, addresses the problem of disjointed

and projectized reform.

Second, BESRA parallels the Congress-initiated EDCOM. Lodged in the executive branch of government, however, it promises to overcome EDCOM's weakness of having a strong congressional backing for legislative proposals but "much less influence on eventual action" [Imperial, 2007].

Third, like EDCOM, BESRA integrates past and present education reform frameworks and discourses. Its general objectives are anchored on the targets of EFA and refer to universal access and success for children in basic education schooling. BESRA's discourse adopts the shift from education as the acquisition of knowledge and skills to education as the learning of key competencies. BESRA, like EDCOM before it, thus pays special attention to the language of learning and the decentralization thrust that enhances the relevance and effectiveness of learning programs. In fact, decentralized governance through school-based management as articulated in RA 9155 is the core strategy of BESRA.

Fourth, beyond discourses, BESRA benefited immensely from new research findings on cognitive processes as well as strategies that have actually worked for reform projects like BEAM and TEEP. BESRA's documents, for instance, integrated entire sections of the DepEd-TEEP's SBM manual.

Fifth, BESRA's comprehensiveness is reflected in the five Key Reform Thrusts (KRTs) around which recommendations are organized:

KRT 1: Get all schools to continuously improve with active involvement of local stakeholder.

KRT 2: Enable teachers to further enhance their contribution to learning outcomes using clearly defined competency standards.

KRT 3: Increase social support to attainment of desired learning outcomes by defining national curriculum strategies, multisectoral coordination, and quality assurance.

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 the DepEd to better support these key reform thrusts.

Approaching reform in the broad and multi-component approach of BESRA is a significant deviation from the typical pilot project design that isolates problem variables for intervention.

BESRA as projectized reform

While it offers a way out of the *de facto* “reform of the basic education system through disjointed projects,” BESRA still exemplifies key features of projectized reform. For one, the initiative for BESRA emanated formally from the DepEd but, unlike EDCOM, its formulation was supported by the World Bank. Moreover, the scale of the intended reform throughout the country requires bigger investments for specific components and subcomponents and, hence, financial assistance from foreign donor agencies and the private sector. There seems to be a demand as well for external technical support to read, process, and prioritize the outputs of BESRA. As with previous reform projects involving the department, external consultants rather than an internal DepEd team may be asked to provide the intellectual resources for planning and carrying out the expected reform.

Is there institutional commitment to BESRA such that DepEd executives would push its implementation regardless of their own sense of priorities? Will BESRA be another addition to the country’s virtual museum of well-analyzed, coherent, and discursive reform surveys with recommendations that have wide-ranging implications for education reform, if implemented? Or will it finally catalyze the massive transformation of Philippine basic education (and with it, higher education) from the ground up?

Seeds of hope: When a project is less of a project

Although there are indications that BESRA might just operate like another reform or pilot project, there are important differences in how BESRA will be pursued by the DepEd compared to other

reform projects.

One important difference lies in the reconfiguration of EDPITAF’s management of BESRA. It will differ drastically from the old practice where EDPITAF operated almost completely independently of other DepEd offices. BESRA documents suggest that EDPITAF will involve various sectors in different levels of the bureaucracy not only in the implementation of the project, but also in key planning aspects of the reform activity.

The preparatory work that went into finalizing the BESRA policy proposals already demonstrated this change in practice. The various policy proposals were developed after intensive consultations in workshops organized by consultants and involving various partners—DepEd personnel at the school, division, region, and central/national levels, and key representatives from the CHED, the National Economic and Development Agency (NEDA), the Civil Service Commission (CSC), the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), business and industry, LGUs, NGOs, private foundations, corporate foundations, academe, among others. This unprecedented level and scope of consultation has contributed to an unusually high level of acceptance of many of the key policy proposals. Enhancing the acceptability of BESRA and broadening stakeholder ownership of the agenda, however, would entail the more active involvement and visibility of the DepEd secretary as its chief advocate and champion.

Interestingly, the involvement of many sectors of the DepEd bureaucracy and external stakeholders would not have been possible without the support of foreign funding and external consultants. Thus, in this particular respect, projectization had its advantages. However, the project management’s (i.e., EDPITAF’s) plan of undertaking a wider and deeper level of consultation of the DepEd bureaucracy, with external funding support and, when necessary, outside consultants to realize this plan, indicates an important shift in defining the relationship between reform project activities and the mainstream of the DepEd bureaucracy.

A similar shift can be found in the creation of the Technical Coordinating Team (TCT) and

technical working groups (TWG) responsible for the various KRTs. The TCT, which is chaired by senior DepEd managers, is responsible for providing central-level coordination and forwarding BESRA recommendations for adoption by the DepEd management. The TWGs, on the other hand, are new quasi-decision-making bodies created within the DepEd bureaucracy that are mandated to plan and oversee the implementation of each of the KRTs. They are, in fact, headed by bureau/service directors. The introduction of TWGs partially addresses the original concern regarding the marginalization of large sectors of bureaucracy, as the TWGs bring in the perspectives of other sectors through their representatives.

Another important development relates to the extent to which the DepEd has engaged the larger public in its BESRA advocacy. The DepEd has pushed BESRA rather strongly as the framework for all reform activities in Philippine basic education, including foreign-assisted reform projects. Its advocacy with the donor community was so effective that most members of the international donor community now only support projects that fall within the specific reform components of BESRA.

An unintended consequence of this advocacy is the forged unity of the international donor community behind a common resolve to make BESRA work. Collectively, foreign donors now have a clear framework for ensuring that the DepEd only pursues reform activities that are aligned with BESRA. Suddenly, and perhaps unwittingly, the DepEd has thus put itself in a position of having stronger accountabilities to the donor community, which is its main benefactor for the more expensive aspects of BESRA.

But the increased external accountabilities are not only established in relation to foreign donor agencies. Even local stakeholders now stand in a stronger and clearer position to hold the DepEd accountable for the progress of BESRA. The captains of industry led by the Philippine Business for Education, for instance, adopted BESRA as the framework around which their own intervention projects and advocacies will revolve. Other private foundations are likewise aligning their

education-related projects to the BESRA principles and designs. These commitments were built by extensive consultations and advocacy work with these groups. Therefore, the stakeholders have a deep understanding of BESRA and would know when the DepEd is not toeing its own line.

The more extensive involvement of the DepEd bureaucracy, the wide consensus building that includes varied education stakeholders, and the increased levels of accountability being exacted from the DepEd are important features of BESRA that address some of the key limitations of the DepEd's projectized reforms. These positive developments remain tenuous, however, since the DepEd can easily revert to old practices when the BESRA implementation becomes too difficult or when leaders at the top echelons of the bureaucracy fail to prioritize BESRA reforms.

Moving BESRA forward

The following recommendations aim to support the DepEd's difficult struggle to move BESRA forward and, in the process, strengthen its institutional capacity for education reform.

■ **Constitute the Technical Coordinating Team (TCT) as the central command of the BESRA reform process; assign the accountability for decentralized reform to its members.** A reform movement as wide in geographical coverage and deep in substantive scope as BESRA demands committed cadres at the highest echelon of the bureaucracy. While it may be unrealistic to expect all members of the TCT to give BESRA their full attention, it is nevertheless urgent for one or two members of the team to treat BESRA as their time-bound project and work full time in managing, monitoring, coordinating and, if necessary, filling gaps and troubleshooting the complex implementation of BESRA throughout its different phases. Backed by the authority of the DepEd secretary, the ones in charge should be accountable to the TCT, the central command of the reform operations which ought to meet regularly and in full force to assess the progress of BESRA.

■ **Reconfigure the role and operational functions of the central office and lower levels of the bureaucracy.** To carry out the BESRA strategies, it is necessary to redefine the role of the DepEd central office, including its various bureaus. The DepEd's top-down management process, in which no one down the line moves without an explicit memo from the central office, is antithetical to the core values of decentralization in BESRA. As such, it needs to be reconfigured.

For the schools to be truly empowered, the central office might have to take on functions other than prescribing particular practices. Perhaps it should take on roles that are more similar to orchestrating different units and ensuring that they move toward the same goal, even as they may move through various routes. For example, the central office might focus on helping different schools and communities determine which among the various types and levels of reform interventions are more appropriate, given the characteristics of the schools and the communities. In this regard, there would be a need to reconfigure the functions and processes of the regional and division offices as well. Such reconfigurations would require capacity building for the DepEd staff even at these higher levels of the bureaucracy.

While the roles and functions at different levels of the DepEd are being reconfigured, it might be opportune to begin rethinking the organization of the bureaucracy. Rather than the present structure based on education levels (e.g., elementary, secondary), the department bureaus might be rationalized along more functional lines (e.g., quality assurance, learning contexts and strategies, alternative learning systems). The functional integration of existing levels promises to enhance crosscutting policy and program reform.

■ **Assess and manage resistance to change.** One of the key issues relates to the DepEd's ability to absorb the consequences of many of the BESRA policy thrusts. Decentralization through SBM is such a major policy shift that it is quite likely for a huge bureaucracy like the DepEd not to fully appreciate its consequences for the department's functioning

at many levels. The seemingly equivocal position of some DepEd representatives on the district supervisors' lobby in Congress to amend RA 9155 attests to this.

It is recommended that the DepEd take deliberate steps toward assessing and anticipating the risks at different levels of its operations. These include risks at the community and school level, keeping in mind the wide diversity of economic and sociopolitical conditions surrounding the over 50,000 schools in the country. There are also important risks related to the middle and higher levels of the DepEd bureaucracy, whose members can very easily undermine the decentralization efforts. Anticipating these risks, learning from the experiences of BEAM and TEEP, and, more importantly, mobilizing the DepEd's human resources and social capital to rally support among the DepEd's officialdom for BESRA should contribute toward fine-tuning the implementation aspects of its policy thrusts **[Box 2.4]**.

■ **Strengthen TWGs and multisectoral decision-making processes.** The creation of TWGs is a positive step toward gaining more widespread ownership of the outcomes of projectized reforms. However, the effectiveness of the TWGs is highly dependent, first and foremost, upon the sense of accountability of members, most especially the chair, for the success of their respective KRTs. It also depends on whether the TWGs remain truly representative and strive to forge consensus within their constituencies. The risk of unilateral decision-making is likely when sector representatives start viewing their participation as merely token, and are not actually part of the decision-making and planning processes.

There are two ways by which the multisectoral representation in the TWGs can be strengthened. First, the DepEd could find a way to provide financial, material, and human resources to support genuine consultative activities of the different TWG members. The suggestion clearly has a strong projectized flavor, but infusion of external support for such consultative activities can only work to further strengthen the push toward more decentraliza-

tion. Second, the outputs of the TWGs should carry more weight in the final plans and decisions of the DepEd as an institution. This suggestion might require drawing more direct lines of reporting and accountability from the TWGs to the DepEd's central decision-making group.

■ **Expand advocacy for and the social marketing of BESRA.** Getting the entire DepEd bureaucracy to become more aware of BESRA and commit to it in the shortest possible time is urgent. There is still a lack of awareness, if not resistance, halfheartedness, or skepticism about BESRA even among the ranks of undersecretaries and assistant secretaries. Beyond the DepEd, the commitment of more sectors to BESRA would rebound to a stronger network of support and create a larger community that can demand accountabilities from the department.

In the short term, advocacy and social marketing will provide the DepEd the resources to augment its limited coffers. The success of the Brigada Eskwela is an important case in point. Over the long term, this wide social network will be a watchdog that will keep the bureaucracy on its toes, so to speak. The target of such advocacy and marketing efforts should include key sectors of the government bureaucracy, especially both houses of Congress, as well as the private sector.

■ **Prioritize capacity building.** The key features of reform directed at decentralization involve empowering and capacitating sectors of the DepEd bureaucracy that have traditionally been left to fend for themselves and make do with what little they have. For decentralization to work, the DepEd needs personnel, especially teachers, who can be effective in spite of the limited resources at their disposal. The DepEd should, therefore, prioritize efforts to build capacities among its staff, and focus on capacity building that is self-sustaining in the long term.

■ **Continue developing efficient systems of procurement, financial management, human resources, and formula-based allocation of MOOE.** The aide memoir on the implementa-

tion of BESRA noted improvements in the system of procurement of goods. It cited, for instance, that the DepEd's decision to unbundle the procurement of book manuscripts from printing contributed to the lower price of textbooks.

In the area of financial management, however, the aide memoir observed that much more work is needed in implementing agreed upon financial management systems that are in accordance with the New Government Accounting Systems, various COA and DBM circulars, and other rules and regulations. In connection with formula-based MOOE allocation, the drilling down of funds directly to schools via this formula would go a long way in improving financial management at the lowest levels of the bureaucracy and, more importantly, in giving SBM an extra push through greater empowerment of school heads.

■ **Prioritize efficient and cost-effective interventions.** Given the volatility of the fiscal situation that surrounds the DepEd's operations, it is not likely that the material resources available will improve dramatically in the future. The DepEd's dependency on donor organizations is understandable as it pushes for major reforms, but there are long-term consequences of such dependence. Thus, the DepEd should push for reform activities that do not require additional infusion of external funds, but instead involve more cost-effective use of existing funds at all levels of the bureaucracy. In the long run, the goal of the DepEd is to undertake reform or school improvement efforts that are no longer implemented as an externally funded project.

■ **Define new metrics of success.** At some point, when the consequences of BESRA become more concrete, the DepEd will need to develop appropriate metrics for assessing its progress. Clearly, some of the standard metrics such as participation rate, cohort survival rate, dropout rate, and all those defined in the EFA 2015 need to be preserved, albeit with a common operational definition among actors at all levels of the bureaucracy. But in some of the more important

Box 2.4. The decentralization of health services and lessons for education

Since 1991, local government units or LGUs have assumed a greater role in the financing of basic education and in the provision of health services. The expected gains from the devolution are based on the assumption that LGUs have better information about the preferences of their constituents, and also better incentives to act on their superior information because of their direct accountability to the service clients. It can be argued, however, that a national government agency can achieve the same informational advantage if some functions of the central office are assigned to the local offices.

The Department of Education (DepEd) adopted this particular form of decentralization in 2001 when it deconcentrated administrative and fiscal powers and responsibilities to school-level authorities. While the question of whether devolution or deconcentration is the better alternative to achieve desired education outcomes cannot be answered directly at this time, a number of lessons from the country's experience with health decentralization may inform policy discussions.

First, a big bang approach to devolution does not always work. The whole process of transferring health functions, services, and personnel to LGUs was completed in almost a year only. The advantage of the big bang approach was that resistance to reform was preempted. The disadvantage was that legitimate concerns and issues were not articulated and studied.

The schedule of the school-based management (SBM) rollout seems to be too fast. According to plan, by the end of school year 2008-2009, already some 80 percent of all public primary and secondary schools will have advanced to mature level of SBM standard. This means that, among other things, the LGUs will have institutionalized a multi-year budgeting for the Special Education Fund (SEF). Very few LGUs have the requisite technical, political, and financial capacity to do so.

Second, finance should follow function to each LGU. This means that each LGU should get adequate incremental fiscal resources to finance its share in the devolved function. This should avoid the past situation where many provinces and municipalities were unable to sustain their health financing. Also, each LGU should understand that they get the incremental resources because of the devolved functions. This should disabuse local officials from thinking that they can refuse additional expenditure responsibilities.

A first step toward ensuring this is already done under the SBM initiative through the estimation and direct transfer of MOOE (maintenance and other operating expenses) budget to each school or school cluster. These estimates will provide the basis for the required incremental resources needed by individual LGUs were they to manage the school themselves. This does not necessarily mean, however, that LGUs should be tied to spending their incremental resources on education alone. They should still be given the freedom to determine exactly how to spend their additional funds for education.

Third, the welfare of the devolved personnel should be protected. The working condition, career paths, job description, and the prospects for professional development of the local health workers effectively and largely changed for the worse after 1991. The Department of Health (DOH) should have planned for the transition of its personnel to the local bureaucracy to ensure that the original terms of their employment contracts were respected or approximated in their new posts.

Protecting the welfare of devolved personnel might involve some changes in civil service and audit rules. The DepEd may have to provide supplemental funds to the low-income LGUs to ensure that the devolved school staff will get the same salary levels as before.

Fourth, the systems of political and bureaucratic accountability should be improved. While the Local Health Board (LHB) was designed as venue for public participation in health planning, many of them were either not constituted or did not continue to function. Hence, they failed to provide the check and balance necessary to steer health service delivery and financing in the public's favor. Further, health is hardly a local election issue.

The Local School Boards (LSB) should be organized and made functional, as is already being pursued under the SBM initiative. To improve political accountability, teachers should be absolved of their election duties. Through social advocacy, the DepEd can also ensure that voters and candidates will take education as a local election issue.

Other accountability issues are the establishment of a School Governing Council (SGC) in addition to making the LSB more functional, where the DepEd, in cooperation with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), may want to expand (1) the LSB membership to include those in the SGC who are not yet LSB members and (2) the functions of the LSB to include those of the SGC.

Also, there is the issue of accountability of the school principal to the LGU/LSB, who should ideally have some say in their hiring, promotion, retention, retirement, or dismissal. To avoid abuse, however, an objective system of LSB evaluation

of the school head should be adopted.

Finally, incentives of DepEd bureaucrats should be changed and aligned more closely with the outcome of the institutionalization and not be based on outcomes of pilot SBM projects.

Fifth, a system of monitoring and evaluation should be in place before the devolution rolls out. One of the unfortunate consequences of devolution was the fragmentation of the health information and surveillance system. Many local health personnel submit their reports to their local chief executives, many of whom neither have the time nor technical appreciation of health data. Hence, the DOH did not have a complete and timely basis for its planning.

Again, the SBM initiative is already putting in place a useful monitoring system, including a scheme for tracking the sources and uses of school funds and student performance. The only remaining concern is that the local monitoring systems will continue to be linked up to the national level.

Sixth, first be strategic, then tactical. Considering that devolution was a major organizational change for it, the DOH only organized an ad hoc unit—the Local Government Assistance and Monitoring Service (LGAMS)—rather than empowered regional units to deal with issues and problems concerning the LGUs. Moreover, the DOH central office continued to administer the vertical health programs and the so-called retained hospitals. A strategy, the Health Sector Reform Agenda (HSRA) was finally crystallized only during the term of President Joseph Estrada.

With the Basic Education Reform Agenda (BESRA), the DepEd has already made the first step in being strategic. All that the DepEd needs is to build on its previous experience to adapt the BESRA to a devolved setting.

Seventh, bottom-up planning is better than top-down planning. The DOH soon realized the need to listen to the LGUs first before making any plans. Toward this, the DOH reengineered itself by strengthening its regional offices. It then supported the LGUs in formulating their province-wide investment plans. These plans then became the basis of DOH interventions in the localities.

Bottom-up planning is one approach that DepEd has yet to institutionalize. The school budget planning that the LSBs do is limited to the SEF; the rest of the school budget is determined at the regional and central level. Bottom-up planning may be necessary even under the present situation because there might be wide variations across schools to warrant various SBM configurations. The baseline assessment of the SBM initiatives should include information and analysis of the school environment, including the proclivities and abilities of target partners, before any SBM initiatives can be drawn up for each school.

Eighth, the appropriate role is that of a steward, not a general. The DOH now understands that it can only guide and try to influence local health systems. While it helps LGUs make informed decisions, it also accepts that they are “free to fail” under autonomy.

In a way, by making the schools develop their own school improvement process and annual investment plans under the SBM initiative, stewardship is already exercised. A good consequence of this will be the germination of local best practices in education service delivery and financing. A bad consequence, of course, could be the deterioration in education quality in some places.

Ninth, leverage grants and minimize use of unconditional transfers. Instead of providing unconditional transfers which only encouraged dependence on the DOH, the DOH is now shifting to a contractual mode when it deals with LGUs. For example, when it provides resources, service agreements specify the rights and responsibilities of the DOH and LGU, as well as performance benchmarks used to measure compliance.

Under the SBM grants scheme, the school is made to compete for grants by submitting proposals. As an extension, the DepEd may want to leverage the SBM grants for greater SEF commitment to support the school plans as approved by the LSB.

Tenth, promote minimum service standards more than best practices. The DOH tried to both implement minimum service standards and encourage best practices. Replicating the best practices, however, proved to be difficult partly because it is hard to standardize practices so that they can be adopted elsewhere. In contrast, minimum service standards are more easily and widely enforced. The Sentrong Sigla seal of quality proved to be enough incentive to many LGUs to upgrade their health facilities.

Source: Capuno [2008]

BESRA goals, particularly those related to school-based management, teacher quality, and the attainment of curriculum standards, the DepEd will need to develop better assessment tools and assessment systems. For example, if some schools successfully develop learning modules that involve indigenous learning resources, textbooks may become superfluous. Thus, the metric of one textbook per student may no longer be appropriate.

The most important metric to develop, however, relates to student learning. The performance of BEAM schools in higher-order thinking, for instance, suggests that some schools are helping students achieve much higher levels of attainment that are not being measured by the DepEd's existing tests and measures. But the need for new success metrics should also apply to the various levels of the DepEd bureaucracy as they take on new functions. One of the more effective ways of facilitating the transitioning into new responsibilities is the adoption of appropriate performance appraisal systems with corresponding success indicators.

In conclusion, BESRA offers the very real possibility of shifting out of an externally induced, disjointed, and projectized mode of pursuing education reform. The biggest challenge facing the DepEd today is how to substantiate, operationalize, and implement BESRA with firm resolve and unflinching commitment. Addressing this challenge calls for focused orchestration at the highest levels of the institution through

a proactive Technical Coordinating Committee which should meet more often than once in six months; transformative leadership at the central, regional division, district, and school levels of the bureaucracy; strong partnerships with an ever expanding community of education reform advocates and change catalysts in government, academe, the private business sector, nongovernment organizations, donors, and geographic communities; and a critical mass of organic staff and DepEd partners who will pursue clearly defined goals and strategies with the fervor, sense of urgency, and mission of reformists who are bent on making a difference for future generations of Filipino children.

Hopefully with BESRA, the DepEd can begin to change the structures, processes, procedures, mindsets, and behavioral practices that have thwarted the transformative potentials of reform interventions since Counts wrote his critique of Philippine education in 1925.