

EXPANDING ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL RETARDATION

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Introduction

The need to expand access to welfare and education of children with mental retardation and other disabilities take on a sense of urgency as evidenced by an increasing public awareness and concern for them. This development may be attributed to the strong advocacy role assumed by the parents and to the several laws enacted in the last decades. Vital among such recent legislations is the Republic Act 7277 or the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, an act providing for the rehabilitation, self-development and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into the mainstream society and for other purposes. This act is replete with opportunities for people with disabilities to access services of government and non government.

The implementation of “Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights Based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific” provides for regional policy recommendations for action by Governments in the region and concerned stakeholders to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disability in the new decade 2003-2012. This legal document further raised public awareness regarding children with disabilities that eventually resulted in propelling both the government and non government organizations into actions.

In consonance with this, the Office of the President issued the Presidential Proclamation No. 240, declaring the period 2003-2012 as the Philippine Decade of Persons with Disabilities. Consequently Executive Order No. 417 dated March 22, 2005, was issued by the President instructing all heads of departments, chiefs of bureaus, offices, agencies and instrumentalities of the national government, and local government units to implement plans, programs and activities towards the development of persons with disabilities.

Special Education in the Philippines

Special education started in the Philippines is now celebrating its millennium having started in the Philippines 1907 with the establishment of the Insular School for the Deaf and the Blind, a residential school located in Pasay City, Metro Manila by M. Delia Delight Rice, an American educator. This was later reorganized in 1970 into two separate government special schools: the Philippine National School for the Blind, and the Philippine School for the Deaf. Other government and private special schools based on categorical disabilities were also set up. Special schools were first set up for people with: mental retardation and physical disabilities in 1927, cerebral palsy in 1953, and behavior problems and chronic illness in 1962. Such schools were few and private special schools were economically not accessible to many people with disabilities. Moreover, there was some social stigma attached to attending special rather than regular schools.

In 1956, a more formal training of teachers for children with mental retardation, hearing impairment and visual impairment was offered at Baguio Vacation Normal School.

In 1957, the Bureau of Public Schools (BPS) of the Department of Education and Culture (DEC) created the Special Education Section of the Special Subjects and Services Division. The inclusion of special education in the structure of DEC provided the impetus of the development of special education in all regions of the country. The components of the special education program included legislation, teacher training, census of exceptional children and youth in schools and the community, the integration of children with disabilities in regular classes, rehabilitation of residential and special schools and materials production.

Growing social concern for the welfare and integration of people with disabilities voiced by parents and advocates including legislations led to the enactment of Republic Act 5250 which established a ten-year training program for teachers in 1968 and led to the admission of children with disabilities into regular public schools. However, without appropriate school and parental support, these children had difficulty coping with the regular classes and soon dropped out of school. To date, enrollment (SY 2006-2007) of children with disabilities recorded a total of 162,858 served by the various programs below.

SPED Programs

The ultimate goal of special education shall be the integration or mainstreaming of learners with special needs into the regular school system and eventually in the community (Policies and Guidelines for Special Education, 1997). However, the Department of Education also acknowledges the fact that the provision of least restrictive environment for children with mental retardation is hinged on the degree of severity of each learner. Educational services for children with special needs (CSNs) in the Philippines come in several forms. These include:

➤ Resource room plan

Under this scheme, the child is enrolled in the regular school program but goes to a resource room to use the specialized equipment either in a tutorial situation or in a small group. The resource room teacher functions both as an instructor and as a consultant. The usual procedure is for the trained resource room teacher to serve the area of exceptionality. However, occasionally, in small communities, necessity may dictate that the resource room teacher serves children with a variety of learning disabilities.

➤ Itinerant teacher plan

Under this plan, an itinerant or traveling teacher serves one or more regular schools depending on how many pupils need special help. The teacher gives direct and consultative services to children and in addition observes, diagnoses, makes referrals and evaluates performance.

➤ Special class plan (Self-contained and primed for mainstreaming)

This plan is aimed at children with more severe problems which make it difficult for them to learn in a regular classroom setting. At times, they may be with their normal peers, but are usually not in an academic situation.

➤ Special education center

This adopts the “school-within-a-school” concept. The Center is administered by a principal and operated according to the rules and regulations that govern a regular school. The Center functions as a Resource Center to support children with special needs in regular schools, assists in the conduct of school-based INSET, produces appropriate teaching materials, and conducts continuous assessment of CSNs.

➤ Special day school

This type of school serves specific types of children with moderate to severe disabilities. A comprehensive array of medical, psychological and social assessment and the presence of a trained special educator are services that this school offers.

➤ Hospital instruction

This type of instruction is for the severely emotionally disturbed, the profoundly retarded who are bed-bound, the crippled, those with chronic and/or serious health disabilities, and recovering patients. Services include both bedside tutoring and group instructions. When a patient has recovered and returned home, he/she is enrolled in a regular school.

➤ Community-based delivery system

CBDS is for children with special needs who reside in distant communities and cannot avail themselves of existing special education programs. They are reached by teachers, para-teachers or volunteers who were trained to teach the basic 3 Rs and self-help activities to prepare them for useful and independent living.

Table 1
PRESENT PROVISIONS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
Special Education Facilities for SY 2006-2007

	Private	Government	Total
Special classes		4436	4436
SPED centers		158	158
Regular schools with SPED programs	495	1703	2198
Hospital schools		3	3
Residential schools	15	8	23
TOTAL	510	6,308	6,818

Alternative Educational Models for Children with Special Needs

- ⌘ Home-based instruction has been conceptualized to reach more children with special needs who cannot be served in a school-based or center-based program. The scheme utilizes parents as a primary means in intervention strategy for early and compensatory measure of education and rehabilitation of the mentally retarded. An offshoot of this program is the continuing parent education that improved family’s involvement in the education of the retarded member, while enhancing his opportunities in experiencing success in an educational program.

- ⌘ Hospital-based instruction. Provision of instructions to children with special needs confined in hospitals is made available in coordination with the DepEd. Special education teachers are assigned to the UP-PGH (University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital) Medical Center for such special education program.
- ⌘ Community-based Special Education Program. Basically aimed at providing equity of access to quality education, the community-based SPED program was piloted in 3 regions. The primary goal of this program is to provide basic literacy, numeracy and livelihood skills to out-of-school handicapped children ages 6-15 years through community services and resources.
- ⌘ Vocational Program. Training for livelihood skills for the adult mentally retarded can be done through apprenticeship program. This on the job training is done under the supervision of trained personnel who understands the nature of mental retardation and other disabilities. Training on vocational skills is also conducted by the non-formal education in the elementary level.

Other programs include the hospital school such as the National Orthopedic Hospital School for Crippled Children (NOH-SCC), and the special classes at the UP-PGH Medical Center for children with impaired health.

Public Policy Support for Inclusive Education

The **Philippine Constitution of 1987** reflects the educational effectiveness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that it signed in 1990. In Article XIV, Sec. 2, it is provided that *“The State shall ... establish and maintain a system of free public education in the elementary and high school levels”* with elementary education being compulsory for children. The Constitution also mandates that State to *“encourage non-formal, informal and indigenous learning systems, as well as self-learning, independent and out-of-school study programs, and to provide adult citizens, the disabled and out-of-school youths with training on civics, vocational efficiency and other skills.”*

The Philippines adopted the policy on inclusion education after the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain in June 1994. This conference gave rise to the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education that subscribes to the fundamental principle that *“all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have.”*

The integration and mainstreaming of children with special needs into the regular school system in the country actually commenced in the 1970s. A mainstreaming model for children with disabilities was implemented in one of the schools in Manila in 1974. Prior to 1994, the Philippine government had already undertaken a number of legislative, policy and program initiatives related to special needs education. These include, among others, adoption of the Philippine Plan of Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons: 1993-2002, the preparation of a Handbook on Policies and Guidelines on Special Education in 1987, and the **Child and Youth Welfare Code (PD 603)** which is replete with specific provisions intended for the welfare of exceptional children, As cited in Article 3, Rights of the Child, *the emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted child shall be treated with sympathy and understanding, and shall be entitled to treatment and competent care; and the physically or mentally handicapped child shall be given the education and care required by his particular condition.* Equally important is Article 74, which provides for the creation of special classes. The Article reads: *Where needs warrant, there shall be at least one special class in every*

province, and if possible, special schools for the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded, the emotionally disturbed and the specially gifted. The private sector shall be given all the necessary inducement and encouragement.

Other important laws in support of inclusion education are the **Education Act of 1982** and the **Magna Carta for Disabled Persons of 1992 (Republic Act 7277)** as mentioned above. The Education Act provides for a multi-sectoral thrust in the implementation of inclusion education by mandating the schools to provide for the establishment of appropriate bodies that would discuss issues and promote their interest. The Magna Carta for Disabled Persons on the other hand, likewise provides that the State shall (i) ensure that disabled persons are provided with adequate access to quality education and ample opportunities to develop their skills, (ii) take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all disabled persons, and (iii) take into consideration the special requirements of disabled persons in the formulation of education policies and programs. It also mandates the State to encourage learning institutions to take into account the special needs of disabled persons with respect to the use of school facilities, class schedules, physical education requirements and other pertinent considerations.

The adoption of inclusion education, in effect, provided a synthesizing force for past and current efforts as well as a common platform for new initiatives directed at children with disability and those requiring special education.

Moreover, in response to the Dakar Framework of Action inked during the World Education Forum in April 2000 in Dakar, Senegal, and adapted by various countries including the Philippines, the National Action Plan for Education for All (EFA) was approved on February 16, 2006 by the National Economic Development Authority issued as resolution No. 2, series of 2006. The central goal of the Philippine EFA 2015 is ensuring that all Filipinos acquire basic competencies that will enable them to be functionally literate.

Table 2
SUMMARY OF PHILIPPINE LAWS
RELATED TO INCLUSION EDUCATION

Law, Administrative Order	Description
1. Child and Youth Welfare Code (1974)	Free primary and high schools
2. Education Act of 1982	Re-structuring elementary education
3. Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (1992)	Right of entry to any educational institution; provision of quality services in health, welfare and employment
4. Republic Act 9155	Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001
5. Handbook on Policies and Guidelines on Special Education (1997)	Operational guidelines for teachers and educational institutions
6. Philippine Plan of Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012)	Unifying all government efforts to provide education and welfare for children with disabilities
7. Philippine Education for All (EFA) 2015 National Action Plan	Functional literacy for all

As a matter of policy, the Philippines through the Department of Education has enunciated a number of implementing orders thereby expanding access to education.

- ❖ Department Order No. 126, s. 1990, which calls for the national implementation of the *Parent Learning Support System (PLSS)*.
- ❖ Department Order No. 1, s. 1997 entitled *Organization of a Regional SPED Unit and Designation of a Regional Supervisor In-charge of Special Education* which enjoins the Regional Directors to designate a full-time Regional Supervisor In-charge of Special Education and to organize a SPED unit. The SPED Unit includes representatives from the elementary education, secondary education and alternative learning system.

The SPED Unit is tasked with assisting the regional director in the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects on special education.

- ❖ Department Order No. 26, s. 1997 entitled *Institutionalization of SPED Programs in all Schools* which institutionalizes the provision of equal educational opportunities to children with disabilities through special needs education.

The institutionalization is aimed at the following children with special needs: the gifted/talented, the mentally retarded, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, the orthopedically handicapped, the learning disabled, the speech defectives, children with behavior problems, autistic children, and children with health problems.

Educational opportunities are to be provided through the formal system and through other alternative delivery services in education.

The Order also requires all divisions to organize at least one SPED center and SPED programs in each area. Furthermore, it provides training at the regional, division and district levels, and incentives for supervisors, administrators and teachers involved in SPED programs. This issuance started the adoption of inclusive education as a policy.

- ❖ Department Order No. 14, s. 1993 entitled *Regional Special Education Council* which authorizes the regional directors to organize a Regional Special Education Council (RSEC). RSEC is tasked with the following:
 - ✦ To formulate and coordinate the implementation of policies, plans and programs in special education in the region;
 - ✦ To organize regional SPED training team which shall conduct in-service training at the regional and sub-regional levels; and
 - ✦ To establish linkages with GOs and NGOs for either financial or human resources support.
- ❖ Department Order No. 5, s. 1998 entitled *Reclassification of Regular Teacher and Principal Items to Special Education (SPED) Teacher and Special School Principal* which authorizes the implementation of salary grades for SPED teachers and special principals as contained in the Revised Compensation and Position Classification System in the Government Act.

On the part of the Commission on Higher Education, an Order was released to the different colleges and universities enjoining them to expand admission of people with disabilities. To date, more universities are responding to this order. Among the most ardent advocate of the

inclusion of people with disabilities is the famous Centro Escolar University which has graduated more than 50 adults with disabilities in the following areas:

1. Business Management
2. Accountancy
3. Tourism
4. Library Science
5. Hotel and Restaurant Management
6. Education
7. Fine Arts
8. And other non degree program

Technical Vocational education is much preferred by parents because of the immediate economic implications especially to those with mental retardation and other developmental delays.

Strategies for Expanding Access for People with Mental Retardation

1. Enhancing Special Education Centers

To improve the special education program, the school-within-a-school concept was introduced in 1974. In a school that is strategically located within the community a Special Education Center is organized. This Center, manned by trained special education teachers for different types of disabilities and administered by the principal of the regular school, offered an array of educational services appropriate to the needs and capabilities of children with mental retardation and other disabilities. The services included special classes, resource room plans, partial or full integration, and mainstreaming. The rationale for the organization of the centers was to maximize the utilization of expert human resources and consolidation of support for the program, to facilitate supervision and administrative functions, and to provide research opportunities.

The Center functions as a resource center for inclusion tasked with the following: (1) conduct continuous assessment of children with special needs, (2) provide in-service training to school personnel, parents and others involved in the child's life on the "why" and "how" of creating inclusive schools as well as other relevant educational trends and practices; (3) produce and provide appropriate teaching and student materials; and (4) provide support to children with special needs included in the regular classroom in terms of planning instruction and providing a range of educational services (e.g. resource room teaching, itinerant teaching, special and cooperative classes) in collaboration with the regular teachers. The Center does not only focus on enrolling the child with disabilities in the regular classroom but also attempts to assist the regular education teacher and other personnel to respond to the diverse needs and abilities of these children through the provision of appropriate educational programs along with curricular modification and individualized support services.

Table 3 shows the number of mainstreamed children with special needs in public elementary school in the Philippines:

Table 3
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
MAINSTREAMED IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS
SCHOOL YEAR 2006-2007

Region	I	909
	II	964
	III	51
	IV	63
	V	144
	VI	65
	VII	39
	VIII	20
	IX	
	X	12
	XI	9
	XII	53
	CARAGA	90
	CAR	54
	NCR	676
	ARMM	30
Total		3,179

2. Provision of Early Intervention Program as Strategy for Early Inclusion

Alternative models of early intervention for 0-6 years old are being implemented through out the country. The Home-based instruction (HBI) for children with developmental delays utilizing the Filipino Adaptation of Portage Guide to Early Education with parents as teachers of their disabled children has been rolled out as a national model. This Adapted Filipino Portage Guide has already been translated in local language and very recently based on the result of the study, has been translated to English for areas where the Filipino translation is not viable.

A Headstart Program in Manila was another milestone in preschool education for the socially and emotionally deprived. Its clients were siblings of youth offenders or slum dwellers whose parents could not afford to provide them with basic education.

Chosen Children in Cavite houses abandoned children with mental retardation. This institution is managed by a civic-minded couple and financed by friends. Another early intervention program for the abandoned and neglected children with mental retardation is the Hospicio de San Jose managed by the Daughters of Charity in Manila and has other branches in the country.

Table 4

**PERSONNEL TRAINED ON HOME-BASED INSTRUCTION
USING THE PHILIPPINE ADAPTED PORTAGE GUIDE
TO EARLY EDUCATION AS MODEL**

Trainee	2000	2001	2002	2004	2007	Total
Parent/ Caregiver	6	24	24	46	17	117
SPED/Pre-School Teacher	39	42	42	51	63	237
Social/Daycare Worker	3	0	10	6	1	20
Community Based Rehabilitation Worker				8	7	15
Administrator/ Supervisor	3	14	14		32	63
Total	51	80	90	111	120	452

The above trainers have also completed the training of around 900 personnel composed of parents, social workers, SPED and regular teachers, school heads and supervisors. The number above does not include the initiatives of the non government organizations.

3. Teacher Education and Training

The development and success of inclusion education programs depends largely on the quality of teachers and education personnel involved. One of the challenges of inclusion education is providing in-service training to all teachers, with consideration for the varied and often difficult conditions under which they serve. In-service training programs should be relevant and culturally viable.

The Human Resource Development Program for SPED teachers is in place. The Bureau of Elementary Education, Special Education Division regularly conducts summer training programs in such areas as:

a. Summer Training for Teachers of Children with Mental Retardation

Year of Training	Number Trained
2002	80
2003	86
2004	115
2005	69
2006	65
2007	72
Total	487

These summer trainings are funded by Christoffel Blindenmission (CBM).

b. Training on Inclusive Education

DECS Order No. 26, s. 1997, or *Institutionalization of SPED Program in All School* clearly articulates the adoption of inclusive education concept in the different SPED programs organized. Hence, capability building among teachers and school administrators on the adoption of inclusive education as an approach to educating all types of children was conducted nationwide. Corps of trainers on inclusive education were likewise put in place in every region to see to it that all receiving teachers shall be properly oriented on how to provide appropriate intervention for children with special needs included in the regular classes. Consequently, some 100 copies of Training Modules on Inclusive Education were printed for Trainers' use.

Below shows the number of participants trained in inclusive education which, were also conducted with funding assistance from CBMI:

Training of Trainers	No. of participants
2001	83
2002	87

Training of Administrators	No. of participants
2003	510
2004	510
2006	28
2007	114

c. Scholarship on Organization and Administration of Special Education (OAS)

The acceptance or support of the school heads on inclusion is vital to the success of such program. In order to prepare the school administrators, the Department of Education sent annually scholars to the University of the Philippines and recently to the Philippine Normal University to be trained in the organization and administration of Special Education specifically on inclusive education. This program has been ongoing since 1965. This year (2007), CBMI sponsored another 13 school administrators. To date there are around 251 school administrators trained.

4. Curriculum

Section 1 of Article V (Policies and Guidelines Special Education) state the curriculum prescribed for the regular school by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. The schemes may be adopted for special education program depending upon the needs of the special learners: (a) the regular curriculum prescribed for regular children, (2) the modified curriculum which is the regular curriculum with certain adaptations to need the needs of special children, such as inclusion of orientation and mobility for children with visual impairment, and (3) the special curriculum which is designed for children with special needs and aimed primarily at developing adaptive skills and/or their potential. Prototype instructional materials specially designed for the above children are prepared by the Special Education (SPED) Division and made available to the field.

5. Changes in Teacher Education

Teacher education is a key factor in bringing about change towards inclusive education. The teacher education institutions (TEIs) have a major responsibility to improve the pre-service training for teachers in the light of the developments in inclusion education. With the new concepts in dealing with learning difficulties of children, teacher education must rethink, review and revise existing models of regular and special education courses. Teacher education courses promote collaboration between regular class teachers and special education teachers. Knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that are required of teachers to work with children with special needs were defined and incorporated in the teacher education curriculum. Teacher education students should be prepared to work with regular and special teachers and members of the community.

The Commission on Higher Education issued CHED Memorandum Order No. 30 series of 2004 entitled Revised Policies and Standards for Undergraduate Teacher Education Curriculum in accordance with the provisions of the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons (RA7277) and to improve the quality of teachers. Special education and preschool education were added as new areas of specialization.

6. Community and Parental Involvement

The adoption of team approach as support to inclusive schools allows parents and community volunteers to serve as teacher-aide in regular classes. Parent education and parent-teacher partnership is seen as more vigorous and operational in the special education centers.

7. Early Childhood Care and Education

The community day care centers established under the Department of Social Welfare and Development is the first opportunity of children with mental retardation to be included in a more educational setting. There are more than 30,000 day care centers in 41,957 barangays or villages which accommodate children with mental retardation.

While preschool education is not yet part of the educational ladder, the Department of Education has organized preschool classes which accommodate children with disabilities. These are either funded by parents-teachers-community associations and/or local government units (16,300), under the Preschool Service Contracting Scheme (2550), and the NGO organized (219). In very depressed and disadvantaged areas, there are preschool classes (1,428) that are under the Department of Education.

It is observed that in preschool education, the inclusion of children with mental retardation is not a problem.

Table 5
STATISTICS ON PRESCHOOL SY 2006-2007

Type of Preschool Program	No. of Classes	Enrolment	Age Group Served
Day Care Centers	32,787	1,526,023	3-5 years old
NGOs Community-Based Preschool	219	6,570	3-5 years old
DepEd Public Preschools/SRA	1,428	42,840	5 years old

Type of Preschool Program	No. of Classes	Enrolment	Age Group Served
DepEd Preschool Service Contracting Scheme	2,550	67,069	5 years old
PTCA/LGU	16,300	449,222	5 years old
Private Preschools	11,033	394,889	3-5 years old

8. Conferences, Symposia and Fora on Inclusive Education as a Form of Advocacy

National conferences on Special Needs Education are held every two years. These conference-cum-training sessions focus on the policy of inclusion education, approaches and strategies for inclusion, curriculum modification and development of school plans for the implementation of inclusion education. Most of the training is subsidized by NGOs with some help from DepEd and LGUs.

The Training/refresher programs of SPED teachers and regular teachers involved in inclusion education have to be assessed, reconsidered and refocused to enable the teachers to take on their new role. Teachers are perceived to be weak in some areas, including student assessment, classroom management techniques and multigrade teaching methods. The In-service Teacher Training (INSET) Program which addresses some of these weaknesses has to be strengthened in order to support the full implementation of inclusion education.

9. Transition from School to Work

As an initial activity to start the implementation of Transition Program for Children with Mental Retardation, the SPED Division has recently developed and reproduced three curriculum modules. These modules focus on Personal and Social Skills, Activities of Daily Living and Occupation Guidance Preparation for children with mental retardation. To date, the transition program is now on its first year of implementation in 15 pilot schools in the country.

As an implementation scheme, the parents and community resources are harnessed in implementing a more viable and functional transition program. Thus, program varies from each region in view of the presence of industry and other livelihood opportunities in a particular site. A unified scheme however, is seen in the implementing model which, include but are not limited to apprenticeship program, on the job training, consultancy and collaborative model, and mentoring program.

Further, to facilitate the inclusion of youth and adult with mental retardation to the world of work in the community, the Department of Education was provided funding by CBMI to train teachers on transition and establishment of work centers. This enriches the program offering at the Special Education centers.

Outcomes of Expanding Opportunities for People with Mental Retardation

➤ Educational Outcomes

Notwithstanding the issue of cost, successful implementation of inclusion education could generate the following outcomes, aside from observing the rights of children with mental retardation to quality education:

- Higher participation rate, cohort survival or completion rate.
- Higher simple and functional literacy rates.
- A higher employment participation rate.

The attainment of these outcomes, however, hinges on the provision of complementary support systems, especially those directed towards prolonging the holding power of the schools and developing the skills that would enable the youths to engage in productive pursuits after their schooling.

➤ Economics Outcomes

From an economic perspective, the economic returns of inclusion education come in the form of savings in social welfare bill that the State provides to support non-productive persons with mental retardation until their adult life.

The impact of reduced social welfare budget could mean realignment or reallocation of resources to other priority development programs. Moreover, the integration of persons with mental retardation into the mainstream productive workforce could bring in returns in the form of wage contribution to economic output, and also the creation of wealth through entrepreneurial undertakings.

Although all those who successfully go through inclusion education may not eventually join the workforce, it is also not realistic to say that no one from those who do would end up giving nothing in return. The ultimate goal of inclusion education is the full integration of persons with disabilities and other marginalized children into the mainstream of society, including their participation in the productive processes of the country.

With the cited government financial support to education, the issue of effectiveness and/or wastage cannot be overlooked. A research (Rimando, 1990) avers that an entire nation when a child drops out from school. On the part of the child, it is deprivation of rights to education. For the parents or family, it is a lost opportunity for socio-economic advancement, and for the government, it spells the loss of moral, monetary and potentially productive human resources.

➤ Social Aspect

- Impact on Regular children

Given the country's present educational setting, the short-term impact if inclusion education on "regular" children has been both positive and negative, specifically:

- Overcrowding. The inclusion of children with mental retardation and other disabilities represents a sizable addition of new entrants to the educational system, which further strains the already limited facilities and teaching resources of the Department of Education.
- The lowering of the quality of education that result from a higher pupil-teacher ratio and a higher pupil-textbook ratio.

On the other hand, the positive impact of inclusion education is the development of more tolerant and socially adjusted individuals who are more supportive of disabled persons.

❖ Social Returns

Inclusion education has its own social returns. The integration of children with mental retardation and other disabilities “regular” children creates positive social and attitudinal changes in both sets of children, such as:

- Developing greater social and community cohesion by reducing or eliminating prejudices against disabled or disadvantaged children
- Improving self-concept or self-esteem, particularly among the disabled and disadvantaged children, with their acceptance by their peers and their community, and their development of a sense of belonging.
- Growth in social condition with non-disabled students learning to be more tolerant of children with disabilities as they become more aware of their needs. They demonstrate more positive feelings about themselves after spending time helping their classmates with disabilities. They also learn skills that enable them not only to communicate more effectively but also to be more supportive of disabled persons.
- Developing personal principles. Non-disabled children experience growth in the commitment to personal, moral and ethical principles as a result of their relationship with children with disabilities. Parents similarly show less prejudice towards people with disabilities.
- Developing independence and self-reliance. The knowledge, values, attitudes and skills imparted by education in inclusive schools enable children to make their own choices and decisions as well as pursue activities that would make them financially self-reliant.
- Encouraging greater participation in social processes.

Conclusion

- ❖ In the light of limited government funds for the improvement of access to quality education for all, the Philippine model of establishing SPED centers as resource centers for inclusion is very viable and easy to replicate. This model has demonstrated the capacity of regular schools across the country to accommodate children with disabilities
- ❖ Existing school facilities, instructional materials, curriculum, teaching approaches, school organization and management, and other support systems (including identification and monitoring) should be adapted to the needs of inclusive education.
- ❖ Reducing the attitudinal barriers of school staff, parents and community towards children with disabilities is another significant agenda for inclusion in the Philippines. It is important to encourage parents to send their children with disabilities to schools that are in close proximity to their homes.

- ❖ Implementing inclusive education entails additional resources over and above those provided to regular schools. Forging partnership between or among the government, the community, families of children with special needs, religious groups, the private business sector, non-governmental organizations and other organizations provides other viable and sustainable avenues of financing inclusive education.

Future Directions

With about ten years experience in the implementation of inclusion (since 1997), the Department of Education has come up with the following prioritized list of issues and challenges to tackle:

- ✦ Reduce attitudinal barriers of parents, community and schools towards children with disabilities.
- ✦ Prolong the holding power of regular education schools over these children.
- ✦ Make existing school facilities, instructional materials, curriculum, teaching approaches, school organization and management, and other support systems adaptable and suitable to the needs of inclusive education.
- ✦ Provide adequately trained special education teachers to work with regular education teachers in providing services to children with disabilities
- ✦ Provide resources, both financial and logistical, to sustain inclusive education.
- ✦ Mobilize parents of children with disabilities as advocates and, together with the community, provide support for inclusive education.

Major programs and projects that will be implemented to address the above issues are as follows:

- Conduct strong advocacy programs through multimedia channels with self-advocates/people with disabilities, their parents and school personnel sharing success stories on inclusive education.
- Accelerate the establishment of SPED centers in all school divisions and issue policy recommendations urging existing SPED centers to extend technical assistance to neighboring schools based on needs.
- Review existing trained program in SPED and work for the establishment of teacher-training centers that will pilot the restructuring of the course curriculum to ensure that strategies for inclusive education will be introduced to prospective teachers at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Continue efforts on collaboration with government and non-governmental agencies and local and international bodies for financial and technical assistance specifically in early intervention and community-based programs that will facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education schools.
- Organize parent support programs that train parents as partners of teachers to supplement the current pool of SPED teachers.

Having said all of the above, let me finally close with the statement of John F. Kennedy:

*Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress
in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.*

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