

Analysis of the Philippines' K-12 Assessment Framework

Shane Alexander Yusi Laong
De La Salle University

This paper takes a closer look into the recommendations on assessment for the K-12 curriculum in the Philippine setting made by SEAMEO INNOTECH and AusAID. The report analyzed the recommendations, explained its implications into the local educational context through the use of related literature, and provided recommendations for its execution in the basic education level. The report also suggested the following points: First, to continue using the UbD framework to design learning experiences for the learners, since both the UbD, K-12, and the DepEd share a goal to create lifelong learners; Second, the constant use of performance-based assessments, self-and peer reviews, student diaries and scoring rubrics to assess and measure student's overall understanding of the concepts and tasks; Finally, the researcher also made a suggestion to design region-specific courses for the 11th and 12th year to cater to the needs of the learners wherein the region or province's major industry is taken into account.

Keywords: assessment, K-12 in the Philippines

The Philippines' Department of Education (2010) stated that, "The enhanced K-12 Basic Education Program seeks to provide for a quality 12-year basic education program that each Filipino is entitled to. This is consistent with Article XIV, Section 2(1) of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which states that "The State shall establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society." (p.5)

According to the Department of Education (2010), implementing the new curriculum for the Philippines' basic education level was caused by various factors - ranging from the poor quality of the students' unsatisfactory performance as reflected by the scores in their achievement tests; the lack of their preparedness for the world of work because of the congested yet inadequate curriculum, as well as their level of emotional

maturity; the criticisms of being labelled as inferior to the other nations because of the shorter years of academic training; and most importantly, the need for the Filipinos to hone young minds into becoming better citizens of the country. To add, it also hopes to eradicate the idea that basic education is just a pre-requisite to enter tertiary studies; rather, it wants to promote that K-12 education can be enough for an individual to enter the workforce and make the most out of the opportunities that could improve his socio-economic status and the overall way of life (Department of Education, 2010).

For the expected outcomes of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines, it envisions an improvement of learners that are academically competent; globally competitive; exuding with moral and Filipino values; internationally recognized and at par with the high-performing learners from the other nations of the world. To attain these goals, the program suggests the revision of the previous curriculum through decongestion and allotment of additional hours for study, as well as the inclusion of new ones to fine tune their skills, introduce new fields of discipline, and to offer variety that may lead to distributing the learners in various fields of practice.

With the introduction of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippine educational system, schools, together with its stakeholders, would now need to cope up with the changes that it will bring for the expected improvement of student learning and development. Apart from the additional two years that will be added to the existing ten years of the basic education level as well as the obligatory Kindergarten level, an overhaul in the courses will also commence to cater to the needs of the present-day learners. The new courses that will be implemented under the K-12 curriculum, as reported by the Department of Education (2010), would give them the competencies that they would need to become functional, competent, globally-recognized, and self-sustaining members of the society. With that idea in mind, the question of how to deliver and assess these new set of competencies, now collectively known as the 21st Century Skills, should be the top priority of every educational institution in the basic education level.

Assessing if the 21st Century skills were met is a crucial part of the process. According to Graham Gibbs (2006), assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behavior. In many courses it has more impact on learning than does teaching. Testing can be reliable, and even valid, and yet measure only the trivial and distorted learning which is an inevitable consequence of the nature of the testing (p. 23).

The idea of using paper-and-pencil tests for assessing students' performance are now considered as insufficient, because there are other forms of assessment that could be used to measure students' understanding. Translating it to the Philippine context, assessing students' performance in the K-12 curriculum should be more than just the typical exams that most Filipino teachers are accustomed to; most especially because the goal of implementing K-12 in the first place is to make learning more contextualized, practical, and relatable for all learners, whichever classification they may belong.

The challenge for schools and educators at this moment is to design assessment practices that can effectively measure the various products and performances of the learners. Apart from the usual methods of assessment being practiced by schools in

the Philippines, this report will also explore other forms of assessment that can be used to keep track of student learning under the K-12 curriculum.

Analysis

According to the Framework for 21st Century Learning, as proposed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009), learners must develop certain competencies that will help them understand concepts better while training them to harness the fullest potential of these lifelong skills. These competencies, namely, learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, and life and career skills are expected to equip the students with the essential proficiencies that they would need once they enter the world of work and societal independence. To make sure that these skills are met, improved learning support systems are established to assist in achieving these goals. These support systems, like the improvement of learning environments, opportunities for professional development for teachers and administrators, revision of curriculum and instruction to cater to the diverse needs of the learners, and target-specific standards and assessments to measure the performance of the learners, should be designed in direct relation with the goals that the institutions want the learners to attain in the long run.

Upon reviewing the 21st Century Skills framework, one would definitely ask how competencies like these could be measured. And this is where performance-based assessments with feed backing come into play. This kind of assessment is different from the usual, product-based assessment because knowledge and skills are demonstrated in a subjective manner, which in turn makes it more authentic and contextualized. This method of assessment is not made to replace the product-based assessment; rather, it hopes to be considered as another way of effectively assessing the skills and performance of the learners. Product-based assessment, no matter how traditional it may seem, it is still considered as an effective way to assess and measure knowledge. But for the other areas where product-based assessment is inapplicable, authentic, performance-based assessments are the best option possible.

Connecting the ideas of using alternative forms of assessment for the implemented K-12 curriculum in the Philippines, some of the goals of its implementation are directly relating to transforming students into lifelong learners, a characteristic that is aligned to the goals of the 21st Century Skills Framework. Unfortunately, alternative assessment practices for the K-12 in the Philippines are not yet strongly established and disseminated to the educational institutions in the country. According to SEAMEO-INNOTECH and AusAID's report on the Regional Comparison of Basic Education and its Implications for the K to 12 Education Program (2011), their findings suggest these recommendations:

“To align the learner assessment certification system with the K-12 curriculum, expanding the range of assessment methods used, and strengthening the role of formative assessment as an important component of the teaching learning process”(SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

This particular recommendation primarily focuses on making sure that assessment practices for the basic education system in the Philippines are aligned with the standards of the K-12 curriculum. On that note, schools and teachers are

expected to familiarize themselves with other forms of assessment, like performance-based assessment, and most especially on using formative assessment as a tool to track students' understanding of the contents and tasks at hand.

“Align assessment with standards-referenced frameworks to define outcomes, to specify content to be learned, and to describe levels of achievement. This alignment should provide all stakeholders with clear indications concerning expectations of learning outcomes” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

The assessments that the teachers will give to their students must be aligned with the objectives that they have set for their learners. Aside from that, both the objectives and assessments should also be aligned with the learning competencies that the Department of Education provided for all the basic education students in the Philippines. Finally, all the students, parents, and concerned members of the learning community must be able to understand the dynamics of these processes to use it in the teaching-learning process for their own advantage.

“Replace assessment emphasizing summative tests with formative assessment approaches” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

Summative tests have been considered as the staple when it comes to assessing student learning. With the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines, it hopes to emphasize the use of formative assessment tools and methods as a better option for assessing and measuring the learners' understanding and ability. Formative assessments, like observations and self- and peer assessments will provide both the teacher and the students the chance to reflect on their teaching and learning and then devise new ways to make it better. By doing so, a change can be done without disrupting the entire teaching-learning process.

“Modify national assessment program to include a combination of item types, including objective, closed type questions such as short answer and multiple-choice; as well as open ended tasks that mirror the curriculum and its desired outcomes” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

National assessment programs are usually composed of objective type items wherein the students must only choose the best answer from the given pool of options. If this recommendation will be given the priority it deserves, exams would now really be able to have a greater grasp of assessing student learning through the inclusion of items that would make the learners think, analyze, apply and contextualize their learning. That way, teachers will now have a better basis to check if the learners have met the competencies that have been established for them to complete during their years in school.

“Train teachers in the use of a wider range of evidence of student learning than just test scores” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

Tests and quizzes have been the constant forms of assessment that have been used for most basic education schools in the Philippines, wherein the final scores would dictate the students' ability to understand the concepts given during instruction. If the schools and teachers are given the opportunity to explore new forms of assessment, they would realize that test scores are just one of the many evidences that can be used to assess student learning. Formative and performance-based assessments, for instance, provide both teachers and students the chance to explore the teaching-learning process and improve on their previous practices to

establish better alternatives. Also, performance based assessments will be able to showcase the learners' abilities that couldn't be measured by test scores alone, like actual demonstrations, experiments, oral presentations and the like.

“Develop assessment techniques and strategies for mathematics and science that offer the opportunity to assess enabling skills in the sequence of the subject” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

Science and mathematics are two academic subjects which most schools give their utmost priority. To make sure that every learner performs better on these courses, teachers must introduce and use assessment techniques that would enable the students to perform better and fully understand the constructs of the specific topic or task that will be given to them. That way, learners will have a better chance of meeting up the competencies that are expected from them.

“Develop rubrics for assessment needs during curriculum writing to illustrate their use and to identify the kinds of learning outcomes and quality learning expected of students” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

Because most Filipino teachers rely on test scores to assess and evaluate students' performance on a certain task, the newly implemented K-12 curriculum hopes to re-introduce the use of rubrics for assessing student learning. These rubrics will change how teachers evaluate students on the tasks given to them, because performance-based assessments would showcase the students' ability to demonstrate how they understood the learning experiences that the teachers facilitated for them during instruction.

“Expose criteria for performance-based assessment tasks to skills audits, in order to ensure that tasks are realistic, well-specified, and measurable” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011);

If rubrics will then be used as a major tool to assess student learning in the enhanced basic education program of the Philippines, then it is a must for schools, particularly the teachers, to provide specific indicators that would describe the tangible expectations that they have for the students. By providing specific descriptors of performance, students, and even the parents, will have a much clearer understanding on how the students are being graded based from the outputs that they will demonstrate or present.

“Involve written performance-based assessment tasks in mathematics and science that mix both traditional and authentic assessment” (SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID, 2011).

Authentic assessment is considered to be a strong evidence to indicate student learning, because assessment in this form will provide the teachers a chance to see how students' interpret the concepts in their own manner, making it more personalized and relatable for them. If authentic assessments like journals and portfolios are utilized to its highest potential, the teachers and students would then have a clear picture of how they improved their practice from the beginning up to the very recent academic activity. Using these forms of assessment on mathematics and science, however, will also change how teachers view students' understanding when it comes to these courses, because most teachers associate understanding and mastery with the students' ability to solve problems alone.

Synthesis

Taking a closer look into these recommendations, one of the major themes was the suggestion that educators must consider other forms of assessment aside from their tried and tested paper-and-pencil tests. When it comes to assessing students' learning, it's not exclusive to written exams, when in fact formative and performance-based assessments vary in such a way that it can assess different facets of students' performance - from their verbal ability through oral presentations, to application of understanding by experiments and demonstrations, or even through their reflection journals to assess their ability to contextualize their learning.

Assessing these learning activities require teachers to provide feedback, so that learners would know how their performance was viewed and graded by the teacher. Feedback, as defined by Butler and McMunn (2006), is information that can be oral or written and should focus on helping pinpoint areas of strength and weakness. Feedback should provide a person with information on how to improve, and if the feedback is "good" enough, guidance may not be needed. Feedback answers the "what do I need to know?" questions about the work (p. 143). These forms of comments should provide encouragement and positivity so that the learners will be able to translate these as the teacher's way of guiding them to produce and perform better for their learning tasks.

Another important point to take note of was the mention of the use of rubrics for assessing the learners' performances and products in the various courses that they'll be taking under the new curriculum. Rubrics, as defined by Butler and McMunn (2006), are scoring guides containing the criteria used to evaluate a student's performance for a particular task (p.93). These rubrics provide the learners with the different components that will make up their grade. By providing this in advance, the students will know the expectations that have been set for them, and which component to give more focus on to maximize the chances of getting high scores on the task.

Encouraging the constant use of rubrics for the learning activities that will fall under the K-12 curriculum will give the learners to chance to see how they will be graded by their teachers. It would also allow them to improve on their practice so that they can receive better remarks once they complete the tasks given to them. Moreover, the use of rubrics will somehow give the students a better explanation of the quality of their work through the descriptions indicated for each criterion. It also removes subjectivity because the criteria and its descriptors will speak for itself.

In order for the use of rubrics to be successful, teachers must undergo training which is geared on teaching them how to effectively design, implement, and maximize the use of these scoring guides for the learning activities that they will give the students during instruction. Furthermore, students and parents should also be informed of its use, so as to be aware of how these grading techniques work for their advantage.

Third, one recommendation mentioned that efforts should be made to improve the delivery of instruction for Mathematics and Science courses. Indeed, competencies on these subjects are indicators of academic success, but if one of the

goals of enhancing the basic education curriculum is to transform the students into lifelong learners with moral values, mastering and applying learned concepts from these two courses would not be enough. Going back to the 21st Century Skills framework (2009), the message implies that aside from mathematics and science, courses falling under the categories of arts and social sciences are equally essential in making the learners become successful in the 21st century. Applying that now to the local context, schools must also invest time in helping the students improve their performance in all subjects across levels, not just in math and science.

The suggestion to modify national assessment exams to include open-ended and subjective questions and items might change how the students would perform on these tests. Subjective assessments, like essays for instance, provide an authentic and in-depth way of looking into the student's level of understanding on a certain concept or task. If examinations are designed to have both objective and subjective types of tests, it somehow provides a more holistic way of assessing the student's overall performance, making it a better option than just solely relying on objective types of tests.

Based from SEAMEO INNOTECH's K-12 Report (2012) segment on Curriculum and Assessment Pathways, they projected that learners will undergo major assessments to measure their level of overall performance during their 6th, 10th, and 12th year, wherein they'll receive their primary school, high school, and advanced high school diplomas respectively if they're able to meet the standards that have been set for them.

These aforementioned standards and the revised plans for assessing the students' performance during these levels are still unavailable at the moment, but if taking into account the previous educational framework that was used in the Philippines, assessment for these years would be just like the way it was used to be: written exams distributed among the grading periods that will cover the topics taken over the course of the academic year. Now that a new curriculum is being implemented, the way of assessing their level of performance during these three major "academic stopovers" should also be redesigned so that it's aligned to the goals of the new program while targeting the specific skills that the students should have mastered during their years of study. Apart from the written exams, performance-based examinations should also be taken into consideration because they can offer a different perspective when it comes to measuring the learner's grasp of the competencies. This applies perfectly in assessing the learners' performance before their 12th year graduation, most especially because Grades 11 and 12 will focus on consolidating the knowledge and skills that they acquired from the beginning, together with the new courses that they took which focuses on various fields, ranging from science and technology, agriculture and fisheries, music and arts, business, entrepreneurship, etc.

According to Bloxham and Boyd (2007), assessment strongly influences students' learning, including what they study, how much work they do and the approach they take to their learning (p. 29). If the assessments are designed in such a way it wasn't able to make a full, in-depth assessment of the targeted and expected skills, the students might end up not fully understanding the concepts, or only understanding a small portion of the entire idea, therefore not attaining the required

competencies expected from them. With the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in the Philippines, assessment of learner's performance is crucial, because it will dictate if the program is to be considered as successful and beneficial, or not.

Recommendations

To ensure that K-12 curriculum adheres to its goals and makes their visions a reality, the researcher suggests the following recommendations to ensure the success of the implementation of the enhanced basic education program in the Philippines:

First, schools must continue using the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework in delivering and facilitating instruction for the students. Since the UbD is more of a format of delivering the curriculum, using it during the implementation of K-12 would not be intrusive as assumed by some educators in the field. In fact, the goal of UbD to promote understanding is actually aligned with DepEd's goal of making learning a lifelong experience and journey for its learners. It's important to note, however, that the unit plans that will be drafted should be aligned from the objectives up to the assessments of learning.

Second, the introduction and use of rubrics, peer reviews and self evaluations would be a great help in making a more effective way of assessing the students' performance on various tasks during their years of study. The rubrics will guide them on how to perform and accomplish the tasks using the indicators that would categorize their quality of work. Aside from that, rubrics eradicate the sense of unfair distribution of performance marks, because the clearly stated criteria for each component to be graded will be there to state the accepted conditions. As stated by Bloxham and Boyd (2007), self- and peer assessment are crucial elements of helping students to learn from their assessment and become more autonomous learners (p. 30). By this, it means that when the students are given the opportunity to serve as assessors of their own and their peers' performances, they tend to become critical and responsible for their actions, thus making them more self-regulating and independent learners and individuals.

Next, introducing the use of student diaries as a form of assessing their performance would help them reflect on their own learning. For the educators, on the other hand, these journals will serve as an evidence of learning and their personalized view of the teaching and learning process. Litao and De Guzman (2008) mentioned that, "Considered as an effective alternative authentic assessment tool, student diaries can powerfully capture important attributes of teaching and learning situations and other realistic social processes in the classroom, which may provide insights for teachers, as well as course developers" (Foreword, vii).

Fourth, some of the courses for the 11th and 12th year should be designed based on the learners' region and its major industries to increase the number of experts for that particular field or discipline. The goal here is not to isolate and contain these learners to their respective regions, but instead to develop each province or state into a self-sustaining and fully developed area capable of providing services, opportunities, and resources for its citizens. Of course, the effect of this particular proposal would take a longer period of time before it appears, but if these

courses were properly designed, executed, and assessed, a positive effect could be possible.

Finally, schools, particularly the teachers and students, should be aware on how to harness performance-based assessments as a method to measure one's level of understanding of a particular concept or task. As mentioned in the earlier parts of this paper, there are other ways of assessing student learning aside from the traditional and overly used paper-and-pencil tests. Through performance-based assessments, students can express and demonstrate their understanding without the limitations of book definitions and explanations, because they'll express it through their own means, which makes it more contextualized, personalized and original.

References

- Bloxham, S., & Boyd, P. (2007). *Developing effective assessment in higher education: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education
- Bryan, C., & Clegg, K. (Eds.). (2006). *Innovative assessment in higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, S., & Munn, N. (2006). *A teacher's guide to classroom assessment: Understanding and using assessment to improve student learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Care, E., & Valenzuela, E. (2011). *Regional comparison of basic education and its implications for the K to 12 education program*. Manila, PH: SEAMEO-INNOTECH & AusAID.
- Department of Education. 2010. *Discussion Paper on the Enhanced K+12 Basic Education Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.deped.gov.ph/cpanel/uploads/issuancelmg/K12new.pdf>
- Litao, R., & De Guzman, A. (2008). *Authentic assessment: Using student diaries in today's classrooms*. Manila, PH: UST Publishing House
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills. (2009). *P21 Framework Definitions*. Retrieved from http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/P21_Framework_Definitions.pdf
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills. 2011. *Framework for 21st Century Learning*. Retrieved from http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/1._p21_framework_2-pager.pdf