

[Research Note]

Sharing Gifts of Giftedness: A Brief History of Gifted Education in the Philippines

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Abstract: *There is a limited literature on historical studies in curriculum in the country. In the field of gifted education, there is not much literature that is written on the history of education for the gifted. Thus, this study provides a brief historical background of gifted education in the Philippines. It identifies programs and projects done to address the needs of Filipino gifted in several periods. From the Spanish period to the present, the programs for the gifted can be classified into school-based, curriculum-based, and program-based. The result of the study is useful in providing a historical context for the development and implementation of gifted education in the country. Moreover, the result is valuable in the current initiative to develop a national curriculum policy framework for gifted education in the country.*

Keywords: *giftedness; gifted education; Filipino gifted*

Introduction

Gifted education is an important curricular program in Philippine education. Article XIV of the 1987 Republic of the Philippines Constitution enshrines the state's commitment to providing quality, accessible, relevant, and responsive education to all Filipinos. It affirms the state's duty and devotion to provide opportunities for the development of creativity and critical thinking, scientific and technological knowledge, arts and culture, language, and sports. This constitutional provision serves as the backbone for developing different schools including special schools dedicated to the development of gifted Filipino learners. Republic Act 10533 otherwise known as the *Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2012* also necessitates all schools to develop and implement special curriculum programs that develop the giftedness and potential of every Filipino learner.

There are four reasons for the development of this study. First, the Philippines is in the process of reviewing its K-12 Basic Education Curriculum. Part of the review is to look at the special programs offered to the learners which include the Special Program for the Gifted. It is therefore essential to analyze the history of the different curricular reforms and innovations that were introduced in the K-12 Curriculum. Hence this study will provide a historical background of gifted education in the Philippines. It will provide basic information on the type of programs offered and the beneficiaries of the programs. Posner (1995) reminded curriculum leaders and scholars of the significance of curriculum history in the development and design of any curricula. History in the curriculum provides a clear background and understanding of the context in which the curriculum was developed (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2017; Pawilen 2019 Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, 2006). It provides curriculum designers a glimpse of the issues and needs that a curriculum wishes to address.

Second, there is a need to write on the history of gifted education in the Philippines. Globally, Van Tassel-Baska (2004) observed increased publications on gifted education over the past 25 years. However, in the country, gifted education is still a growing and most of the studies done are focused on curricular and instructional interventions. Some of the research published in the Philippines is the study by Wong-Fernandez and Bustos-Orosa (2007) where they presented prevalent perspectives on giftedness in the context of language and culture, and the study of Mingoa (2017) analyzed the factors that contributed to the development of Filipino gifted in science, the study of Pawilen (2008) on the home environment of the Filipino gifted, the study of Camara (1994) on the Filipino conceptions of giftedness, and another by Camitan (2020) where conceptions of giftedness among Filipino indigenous groups was studied. This study will be a useful document for enriching the current discourse on gifted education in the country

Thirdly, the study aims to push for a more inclusive and accessible program for gifted education. As an archipelago, the Philippines is home to more than 110 ethnolinguistic groups speaking different languages and dialects, observing

different cultural practices and traditions, and having different religious beliefs and values systems. Filipinos are dominantly composed of Christians followed by Muslims and other foreign and ethnic religions. This context influenced how Filipinos view giftedness and gifted education. Religious Filipinos view giftedness as a gift of God to bless humanity, while others believe that giftedness is a product of nature (it is part of human DNA) and nurture or because of how families and institutions like schools develop creativity and critical thinking. Giftedness is interwoven with the people's culture (Pawilen, 2018) so it can be found in every cultural group (Clark, 2002). Camitan (2020) and Camara (1993) observed that some contextual and indigenous factors such as spiritual gifts are neglected in the understanding of giftedness in the Philippines while Pawilen (2018) observed that there are factors like a family environment, economic factors, values, and religion that need to consider in planning education for gifted Filipinos.

The gifts of giftedness in the country and its people could be summarized into three: (1) nurturing the gifted individuals and developing them to become the nation's assets in different fields and areas of life, (2) appreciating the beauty and talents that giftedness brings to the cultural development of the nation, and (3) experiencing innovations that gifted minds produce to improve the quality of living. These gifts of giftedness and gifted education are realized when families, institutions, and communities support every gifted individual. Thus, continuous documentation of gifted education is essential. There are essential lessons that we could learn from history.

Giftedness is truly a gift to humanity. Since the beginning of life, people learned whether in religion, science, or mythology that giftedness has shaped the life of people in this planet. It has developed ideas, tools, and other means to help people enjoy the beauty of life and made them understand the nature and all things in this world. Over the years in times of peace or chaos giftedness has nurtured human imagination and inventiveness. Giftedness is a gift to humanity. It is a cultural tradition that should be nurtured.

This study will be a useful document in pushing for the development of a national curriculum framework for gifted education in the Philippines. History will make the curriculum alive in the lives of the people. Understanding the needs of the society, the needs of the learners, and the developments in the disciplines that a particular curriculum tried to address is essential component of curriculum development process (Skilbeck, 1976; Sowell, 1996; Stark and Latucca, 1997; Taba, 1962; Tanner and Tanner, 2007).

Methodology

This study is an attempt to trace the history of gifted education in the Philippines. Data gathering is done by reviewing the available documents found in studies and books and based on the results of the records of what transpired on the discussion during curriculum workshop organized by the Department of Education to develop

a national framework for gifted education in the Philippines. The researcher also looks at brief historical sketches available publicly at the websites of some well-known school for the gifted. Due to the pandemic, the researcher consulted with the two curriculum specialists and examined the minutes of the discussions with 30 supervisors for gifted education of the Department of Education Central Office to validate the challenges and to identify issues and observations on the implementation of gifted programs in the country.

The results of the study are organized and presented in four periods: (1) Gifted education during the Spanish colonization from 1565 to 1898, (2) Gifted education during the American colonization from 1899-1946, (3) Gifted education during the postwar and post-colonial period from 1946 – 2000, and the (4) Current initiatives to improved gifted education in the Philippines from 2001-present. The results are summarized and discussed per period.

Results and Discussion

A. Gifted education during the Spanish colonization (1565-1898)

Spain colonized the Philippines for almost 333 years. Therefore, Spanish influence can be seen in Philippine culture, religion, arts, music, architecture, and in almost all aspects of life. The Spaniards through the establishment of Catholic schools started formal education in the country. There are no mentions of an establishment for schools for the gifted during this period. Schools are basically for the privileged *mestizos* or for the *insulares* (Spanish born in Spain who migrated to the Philippines) and for the *peninsulares* (Spanish who were born in the Philippines). Only the Filipino families who could afford to send their children to schools received a proper education. The bright male students were sent to study at the Ateneo de Manila Municipal (now Ateneo de Manila University) owned by the Jesuits while the best-known institution for higher learning at that time is the University of Sto. Tomas, which is owned by the Dominican Orders.

There are other schools and colleges that were later established by the Catholic Church in different parts of the country that were attended by the privileged few Filipinos. These schools added music, arts, mathematics, religion, physical education, basic science, and language in their curriculum. There were also bright Filipino students who were able to go to Europe to continue their studies in college. These include the national hero Jose Rizal and the artist Juan Luna among others. To attend formal schooling was a dream for every Filipino during those trying periods of our history. While there was no special solely dedicated for the gifted, access to education was a major challenge during the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines.

B. Gifted education during the American colonization (1899-1946)

The Americans established the public school system in the Philippines from elementary to college. The curriculum was restructured to follow the US curriculum putting emphasis on liberal education. Schools were constructed in

different provinces across the country, democratic education was introduced, and English as a medium of instruction was implemented. The US colonial government established community colleges, normal schools (teacher education schools), liberal arts colleges, trade schools, and created the University of the Philippines to provide advanced education to Filipino students.

Free public education was implemented which increased the literacy rate and the number of Filipino students getting an education. The Americans also brought their religion to the Philippines. This helped in expanding access to education among the Filipinos. Missionaries provided opportunities and scholarships to bright Filipino students to continue their studies in the city or in the protestant schools in the US. The US colonial government also provided scholarships for selected Filipino students (who are gifted during that period) to study as scholars in US colleges and universities.

The public Central Schools during this period are the cradles of learning that nurtured many gifted and potentially gifted Filipinos. American missionaries, teacher-soldiers, and US-trained teachers were assigned to teach in various public central schools in the country. Through these efforts, many Filipino gifted children were discovered, taught, and sent to go to good schools especially at the University of the Philippines. English language education became popular and turned to be a status symbol for students who developed fluency and competence in speaking the language.

The term *gifted* may not be popular during the US colonial period in the Philippines but undeniably, it has opened gates of opportunities for Filipino families to send their children to the best public and private schools in the Philippines and abroad. Likewise, the curriculum during that time opened the minds of the Filipino students to become curious, inquisitive, critical, and creative. This democratic education was the best legacy and influence of the US colonial government to the Filipinos in the 47 years of their stay in the Philippines.

C. Gifted education during the postwar and post-colonial period (1946 – 2000)

After the Philippines got its independence back in 1946, rebuilding the whole country from the horrors of war and destruction began. Public institutions were reestablished, and infrastructures were reconstructed. Schools reopened from the ruins of destruction like the mythical phoenix bird emerging from the ashes. The Protestant mission schools, Catholic schools, and public schools were reopened. However, more schools were established, and private individuals and families began to establish their own private schools. The challenge to sustain quality education and the public demand to develop an education system that is Filipino in character and mind became a gigantic task for the Filipinos.

Gifted education was concretely introduced in the school system as the government expanded the establishment of special trade schools (later transformed into agricultural colleges), science high schools, and special schools for the arts.

In the public schools, special sections for bright students were also included and those students' showing potentials and skills in sciences, mathematics, and other fields were given scholarships to continue their studies. More scholarships were granted for gifted Filipinos who wished to study abroad so they could soon return and help serve the country. The government also provided scholarships for students who would want to study in the best universities and colleges in the country. The country started to develop its science and technology programs, arts and culture programs, sports programs, and other innovative programs to boost its educational system despite all economic and political issues it was experiencing. Education became the highest priority of the government in terms of budget.

There are two outstanding programs for gifted education supported by the government. These are the Philippine Science High School System and the Philippine High School for the Arts. There are also several government programs implemented by the Department of Education and few private schools for the gifted in the Philippines.

The Philippine High School for the Arts (PHSA) was established on June 11, 1977, as a government-run secondary school for artistically gifted and talented children and adolescents. It implements a special secondary education program committed to the conservation and promotion of the Filipino artistic and cultural traditions. Aside from academic and artistic training, the PHSA provides its students with opportunities for cultural appreciation that will contribute to their development as artists for others. The experience of living away from home and integrating with peers in this special residential high school cultivates in the young artists an attitude of independence tempered by the spirit of cooperation as they create art together.

PHSA implements a general secondary program that is integrated with a special curriculum in different areas of arts like: Theater Arts, Creative Writing, Visual Arts, Dance, and Music. The school aims to develop cultural leader, performers, and artists who are expected to preserve, develop, and promote Philippine arts and culture (P.D. 1287, 1978). It is committed to the conservation and promotion of the Filipino artistic and cultural traditions and makes every effort to develop the potentials of its young arts scholars as future cultural leaders with a nationalistic orientation.

Another government program for gifted students in the Philippines is the Philippine Science High School (PSHS). It is a service institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) whose mandate is to offer on a free scholarship basis for secondary course with special emphasis on subjects pertaining to the Sciences with the end view of preparing its students for a science career. This is according to Section 2 of Republic Act 3661 that established the first Philippine Science High School campus in 1964. The school maintains a dormitory for all its students. Currently, the Philippine Science High School is a system of several Philippine Science High Schools

located in several regions across the country. Like the main campus in Quezon City, these PSHS campuses are equipped with modern science laboratories, dormitory facilities, modern classrooms, and ICT learning tools. The teachers are specialists in their subjects they are teaching, and they were recruited among the best teachers in their region.

Since its inception, the PSHSS continues to pursue its vision to develop Filipino science scholars with scientific mind and a passion for excellence. Under the competent faculty and administrators, PSHS students have proven to be a beacon of excellence, courage, and hope for the country. Numerous scholars have brought honor to the Philippines through their exemplary achievements in various international competitions and research circles. When the students graduate from the school, they are expected to pursue degrees in Science and Technology at various colleges and universities both here and abroad.

In 1966, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) was established through Executive Order No. 30 s. 1966. The activities that the CCP engages in include different areas like architecture, dance, visual arts, literature, film and broadcast arts, music, theater, new media, and theater. It also promotes local and indigenous artists, and it has hosted numerous prominent and international artists. The CCP served as a laboratory and training ground for Filipino gifted. It also sponsored various workshops and trainings for young potentially gifted Filipinos.

In 1973, the National Music Competitions for Young Artists (NMCYA) was established by Presidential Proclamation 1173. NMCYA is mandated to discover young Filipino talents in music through national competitions. This program provided a venue for competition and performance of gifted Filipino musicians and prepare them for international competitions and performances. It has led to the discovery of many Filipino gifted in music. In almost the same period, the Philippine Artists Foundation was also instrumental in providing scholarships to young Filipino artists who are highly gifted. Many of the outstanding national and international Filipino artists and performers were recipients of the scholarships and support from this Foundation.

In spite of these reforms introduced to improve Philippine education, still, there are many things that need to be done in the field of gifted education like (1) increasing the number of expert and qualified teachers who could teach gifted students, (2) improving educational facilities, (3) increasing support for educational programs that are meant for gifted learners, (4) providing a support system to nurture the giftedness and character of gifted students, (5) providing more scholarships, and (6) reviewing and redesigning the existing curriculum and programs for the gifted.

D. Current Initiatives to Improved Gifted Education in the Philippines (2001-present)

Currently, Philippine schools use special classes and programs to address the needs of gifted students. These special classes and programs are designed considering the areas of the giftedness of the students and their interests. They are implemented during weekdays, weekends, or during the summer vacation of schools. Table 1 shows that in the Philippines, the Department of Education provides special science classes and programs for gifted students.

Table 1. Current School-based Programs Offered for Gifted Education in the Philippines

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- *Special Program for the Arts and Sports*
 - *Special Science Elementary School Project*
 - *Science High School Program*
 - *Head start Program for the Gifted and Talented*
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The Special Program for the Arts and Sports is developed in pursuance of DepEd Order No. 54, s. 2010. Currently, there are 17 schools in different regions offering this program. The curriculum includes supplementary visual arts and performing arts (dance and movements, music) courses that will develop the talent of students and help them pursue their interest in different creative fields. The Special Program for Sports on the other hand includes sports subjects or lessons for students who have gifts in different sports. For both special programs, an additional time allotment on the teaching of these subjects in the curriculum.

Special Science Elementary School (SSES) Project was created in pursuance of DepEd Order No. 73, s. 2008, and DepEd Order No. 51, s. 2010. Since the start of this project in June 2007, the number of schools implementing this program has grown to more than 60 schools nationwide. The SSES Project is designed for scientifically gifted learners in elementary. This project includes the teaching of science in Grades I and II and the use of investigatory projects and other strategies for teaching science from Grade III. The guidelines for the implementation of this project are in DepEd Order No. 57, s. 2011.

Also, in the field of science, the country operates different public Science High Schools in various regions. These schools were established in pursuant to DECS Order No. 69, s. 1993, which was later amended by Department of Education Order No. 89, s. 1993. The science high schools were created for gifted students who have shown an aptitude in science and technology and mathematics. Admission to these schools is highly selective and Science, Math, and English are taught at a higher level. These schools also implement an enriched curriculum that allows students to undertake research, which is not available in regular schools. The teachers are also carefully chosen by the Department of Education to guarantee quality teaching and learning.

Head start Program for the Gifted and Talented is a program that is offered to 4-5-year-old children who manifest gifted potentials compared to their classmates.

It was created in pursuance of DepEd Order No. 99, s. 2009 to ensure that all gifted and talented preschoolers are given the necessary support to attain the highest standard of achievement that matches their abilities, intelligence, and skills.

Table 2. Current Curriculum-based Programs Offered for Gifted Education

- *Acceleration*
- *Enrichment Activities*
- *Special Interest Programs*
- *Special Curriculum Programs*
- *Involvement in co-curricular and extracurricular competitions*

Table 2 shows the different curriculum-based programs offered to Filipino gifted students. Acceleration is offered to highly gifted students who exemplified high level of intellect and superior performance in school. Acceleration is done in 3 areas (1) subject acceleration, (2) grade-level acceleration, (3) early admission to college. Currently the Department of Education through the Bureau of Curriculum Development is perfecting its national curriculum policy for acceleration. Another program for the gifted which is done through instruction and is the integration and implementation of enrichment activities. These are instructional activities, curricular activities, and special projects, that are designed to sustain the interest of gifted students in different subjects. Enrichment activities are also useful in engaging students in more meaningful learning.

The DepEd also offers Special Interest Program (SIP) and Special Curricular Programs (SCP) in areas like music, performing arts, journalism, visual arts, robotics and engineering science, sports, and creative writing among others. To further develop the giftedness of students, the DepEd encourages schools to involve their gifted students in co-curricular and extracurricular competitions – gifted students are encouraged to participate in several competitions, like the National Sports Competition, National School Press Conference, Festival of Talents, and Math Olympiad among others. Students are also encouraged to join *clubs* to nurture their talents and skills

Pawilen and Manuel (2018) observed that while these programs are supposed to be implemented and made accessible nationwide, however, only few elite private schools could offer them. Based on the discussion with DepEd supervisors, these curriculum-based programs are only offered to few public schools due to lack of teachers who can handle gifted students and the lack of instructional materials and other facilities that are required for implementation.

Zirkelbach (2011) observed that there has not been much focus on gifted programs or on gifted students. Gittman and Koster (2000) also pointed out that researchers agree that the needs of gifted and talented students are not being met at an ordinary school and that these students need special programs. These

observations also hold true in the context of the Philippines where giftedness is still a growing field in education and gifted programs are not accessible in many provinces in the country.

Issues and Observations of Education Supervisors and Teachers on Gifted Education in the Philippines

Based on the transcript of the discussions with supervisors and experts from the Department of Education, despite the many innovations, projects, and programs that were introduced for nurturing the Filipino gifted students, there are some observations that still need to be addressed. These observations are presented and discussed in Table 3.

Table 3. Observations on Gifted Education in the Philippines

- *Gifted education is a privilege.* – Only the rich and middle-class families can send their children to good schools for the gifted. It is also a privilege for students who are highly gifted and have passed the entrance exams of science schools, arts schools, and excellent private schools with programs for the gifted.
 - *Gifted education is a dream and aspiration.* – This holds true to families who want their children to go to schools for the gifted, but they do not have the financial means to support the education of their children. These families settle with whatever public school is available near their communities.
 - *Gifted education is a status symbol.* – Parents are proud of their children attending schools for the gifted, and students are recognized as brilliant, genius, talented, and excellent.
 - *Gifted education is inclusive.* – Regardless of culture, religion, or socio-economic status special programs, clubs, and activities for gifted education are offered in every public school. Differentiated instruction, acceleration, and special sections for gifted and potentially gifted children are implemented by the Department of Education.
 - *Gifted education is a social activity.* – Learning an instrument, enhancing individual talents, and discussing advanced topics and issues are done in non-formal less structured ways. The church, barangay (community) centers, peer groups, and community elders contribute to the development and nurture of Filipino children's talents and skills. These are shown in every performance or showcase of talents during school activities, church celebrations, community fiesta, and during Christmas celebrations.
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- *Gifted education is a struggle to continue.* – Not all parents can sustain to send their children to attend special schools for gifted until college unless there are available scholarships and sponsorship from individuals, institutions, government, and politicians.
 - *Gifted education is not learner friendly.* – While schools for gifted provide the best education and training for every gifted learner; the emotional and social environment is not friendly to all students. Some students experience bullying from teachers and schoolmates, the culture to excel in everything, and the spirit of competition adds pressures and emotional stresses to students. Because some schools for the gifted are boarding schools, the emotional pain of students living away from their families is unbearable to many students.
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To address these issues and observations, in 2018, the Department of Education invited experts in various fields, teachers, and supervisors of gifted programs, and curriculum experts from different parts of the country to develop a new curriculum framework for gifted education that will guide schools in developing and implementing programs and policies for gifted education. The curriculum framework for gifted education developed by the Department of Education (DepEd) identified superior intelligence, exceptional abilities, and outstanding talents as the basic characteristics of Filipino gifted learners. In the spirit of inclusion, the DepEd includes students with gifted potentials in this framework. To empower every Filipino gifted to become invaluable assets of the country is the core of gifted education (Pawilen, G.T., Sibayan, I., De Guzman, S., & Buhat, T., 2018).

The new DepEd curriculum framework for the gifted education has four key elements namely: a) the core curriculum, b) enrichment curriculum, c) special program, d) acceleration program. The core curriculum focuses on learning advanced content that will provide an intellectual challenge to the gifted students. Acceleration of the gifted students is a strategy that allows every gifted student to progress through school at a faster pace. Enrichment activities are curricular and instructional activities that provide instructional support for gifted students to pursue their interests in various areas and topics. The gifted curriculum also includes special programs that are designed to develop gifted students' abilities and talents in different areas such as STEM, Arts, Music, Language Arts, Sports, Foreign Language, Business Education, and other areas (Pawilen, G.T., Sibayan, I., De Guzman, S., & Buhat, T., 2018).

Conclusion

Gifted education in the Philippines is a product of the nation's philosophy, values, history, and struggle as a nation, where the family and the community as basic units of the society play an essential role. The type of programs that were offered for the gifted are either school-based, program-based, or curriculum-based. While there are already existing national policies on gifted education, access to these programs is still a major problem. There are still many things that could be aspired to make gifted education accessible and inclusive.

Through the years, gifted education in the Philippines is still limited on the field of science and mathematics. There are only few programs focusing on humanities and social sciences that are available for Filipino gifted. The gift of gifted education to the nation can be seen in different forms depending on the occasion, season, historical event, and context. The variety of Filipino gifted individual's exceptional talent and skills never failed to amaze us and make us proud as a nation. Hence access to quality gifted education is essential for every Filipino gifted and potentially gifted.

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