

Philippines: Country Report on Mental Retardation
by Erlinda E. Elamparo

The Republic of the Philippines is an Archipelago of 7,100 islands on the western arm of the Pacific and stretches more than thousand kilometers north to south between Taiwan and Borneo. It is by the Pacific Ocean on the South, the Sulu Sea on the Southwest, the South China Sea on the West and the Bashi Channel on the North. It is Northeast of Singapore and Malaysia.

The Philippines has a total area of 300,720 square kilometers, North to South, and 1,931 kilometers long east to west and 1,207 kilometers wide with a total coastline of 17,461 kilometers. The biggest island group is Luzon which is 141,395 square kilometers representing 35% of the total land surface of the Archipelago. The Southern Philippines consist of the large island of Mindanao which is about 34% of the total land area. Twenty one (21) percent of the land surface of the Philippines is occupied by the Visayan Group. The Philippines has 72 provinces, 60 cities, 1,445 municipalities, and 42,000 barangays.

In 1982 the Philippines has total population of 49.8 million with an annual increase of 2.8%. Sixty one percent (61%) reside in the rural areas while 39% reside in the urban area. In the statistics of 1975, figures show that 44% of the population are fifteen years old and below. The Filipinos are predominantly Malay, with a mixture of Chinese, Spanish, American and Indonesian blood. The mixture is blending of the western and eastern civilization.

The Philippines has been the colony of Spain, United States and Japan. It has proclaimed a Republic in 1946. The present form of government is parliamentary.

Agriculture is the principal industry of the Philippines as a developing country. The main product includes rice, sugar, abacca, coconut and great variety of fruits.

The colonial nature of education in the Philippines did not change even after the declaration of the Philippine Independence from America in 1946. The school produced graduates who nurtured the fondest wish to work in foreign countries like United States. It was in 1972 when the educational Reform Decree of 1972 has defined the aims and goals of education to be supportive of national goals. To achieve this, the schools and teachers assume a crucial role in formation of a national identity and pride in Philippine heritage and culture. Technical as well as vocational education have been expanded to meet the manpower of the country and to give opportunities to those who could not afford a regular college course. Nearly all top government officials have been educated in the high standards State University that's the University of the Philippines. As a sectarian schools for the upper class such as the Ateneo University, La Salle and others. Presidential Decree No. 977 will serve to broaden national leadership by recruiting into its ranks those who come from other sectors.

Legal Bases for Special Education

Special Education for the Mentally Retarded and other children

with special needs do not profit from ordinary instruction is based on the philosophy premised on the democratic principle that every individual is valuable in his own right and should be afforded opportunities to develop his full potential. Every child, even the most profoundly handicapped, should be given equal opportunities within the nation's educational system. Equal educational opportunities do not mean the same educational experiences but rather different educational experiences based on the child's unique needs."

In the Philippine educational system, two groups of children are given special consideration, both in the public and private sectors. These groups include the gifted and the handicapped. An examination of the Summary of Laws enacted by the Philippine Congress since 1955 did not reveal any law recognizing the need for educating the retarded children except in 1968, when a special law was passed appropriating funds for the Ten-Year Training Program for Teacher of Special and Exceptional Children in the Public Schools among whom are teachers of the mentally retarded.

The Philippine Constitution so provides that every child should be given opportunity to attain his educational goal. For the special gifted and mentally retarded there are provisions for their educational development.

Presidential Decree No. 603 the child and the youth welfare Code provides for the right of the child to be given opportunity and encouragement to develop his/her special talents. That the mentally retarded should be provided treatment and competent care and if and when necessary special classes be established for their educational development.

As to legal rights, Civil Code Republic Act No. 386 and Penal Code (Rep. Act No. 385) provides that every child has the right to live in an atmosphere conducive to his physical, moral and intellectual development.

The Ministry of Education and Culture defines special education as "educational program and specialized services designed to meet the needs of individuals who deviates from the average: intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally and are experiencing significant and or continuing difficulties in learning and in adjusting to normal educational opportunities". Specialized services means modification of curricula and learning environment, special methods of instruction, special equipments and special trained teachers.

The U. N. experts on Mental Retardation estimated that at least 2 to 3% of any given population are mentally retarded. Based on this percentage, there are about 1.4 million mentally retarded children are born every year in the Philippines. 84% are mildly retarded 14% are moderately retarded and 2% are severely retarded.

As to the nationwide survey of Exceptional Children in 1980 a total of 26,381 mentally retarded children gathered in 8 regions in both private and public schools.

Educational Programs:

Under the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Bureau of Elementary Education through Special Education Division is charged with responsibility of directing and promoting special education programs at all levels. To ensure regional implementation of this

program, a special education supervisor is assigned in every region. It is only in the National Capital Region where the comprehensive special Education Programs in Metro Manila is administered by the Director of the Special Education Unit.

Implementing Details of the Program:

In 1966, the training of teachers was started at the University of the Philippines. This was for teacher involved in Special Education especially the mentally retarded. The private sector followed by also offering teachers training for those involved in this special education program. For the past 24 years of teachers training, the most popular area is the Special Education for the mentally retarded children.

As to 1980-81 teacher scholars 19% of the total 1035 had been trained for the special education program of the mentally retarded.

Administrative Provisions for Special Education:

Administrative provisions for special education in the Philippines usually come in the form of segregated programs or special classes in public schools with the latter being a more common practice. Segregated programs are either residential schools or special day schools. Educational facilities are also provided residential institutions run by the Social Welfare Ministry. There are five (5) residential schools run by the national government for various disabilities. For the mentally retarded children we have only one residential school throughout the country. Special day schools are operated either by the national government or by private organizations. There are private schools all over the country which run special education classes and some fifteen private schools.

The most common administrative provisions for the handicapped children is the special class in the public schools. These were originally managed by the teachers who were sent for training either at the University of the Philippines or at the Philippine Normal College or by those who had at least 18 units of graduate work in special education.

The Ministry of Education has undertaken some definite steps in improving the delivery services. The National Capital Region has initiated in : (1) organizing and implementing pilot programs in mainstreaming these handicapped children (2) conducting crash training programs in SPED for regular teacher and planning and working for approval of a new summer scholarship program for prospective teachers in SPED.

With the projected increase of teachers prepared for special education, it is envisioned that more and more of the mildly and moderately mentally retarded will gradually find themselves integrated with normal peers.

Educational Provisions for the Mentally Retarded in the Division of City Schools of Manila:

In view of the growing concern for the retarded persons and the declaration of human rights of the mentally retardates, the schools

in the city of Manila has included them in the educational system. To date there are 10% of the enrolment which comprise this special group. There are 31 of the special classes in 80 schools of Manila until 1975. This is directly under the Counseling and Special Education Services of Manila.

Since 1975-76, there were seventy-one (71) special classes which centralized in six centers established with the regular elementary school. Each unit carried representative classes for all exceptionality, such as accelerated classes for the fast learners, classes for the mentally retarded, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, and the speech defectives. Each center is code named "Silahis", signifying lasting hope for its clientele.

The new administrative scheme was designed to maximize the utilization of expert professional human resources, to facilitate mainstreaming procedures and to consolidate civic support for Silahis programs/projects. With the significant change in the management of SPED programs brought about by the centralization of special classes in the Silahis Centers, there evolved viable and functional program offerings. Curriculum guides, minimum essentials, learning expectancies and developmental materials have been systematically developed to insure progress of the retarded to a level of achievement commensurate with his ability. Periodic program evaluation has been devised to insure better and more effective techniques of individualization in maximizing potentials. Greater emphasis is given to the development of basic academic skills, personal adequacy, social and vocational competencies to enable the mentally retarded to become functional and contributing members of the community.

The total educational program for the mentally retarded in the Silahis Centers is primed for mainstreaming. The center being a part of a regular school facilitates the scheme of total integration. However for purposes of facilitating instruction and avoiding wide differences in age and intellectual level, the pupils are grouped according to the following levels; lower primary, upper primary, and intermediate levels.

- a. Lower Primary. These children range in age from seven to ten years, with mental ability roughly corresponding to $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 years. At this level, the children are not yet ready to pursue academic work so the program is devoted primarily to helping them achieve social adjustment, acquire academic readiness and training in self-care. In this level, the program emphasis is in furthering their social and psychological development. Structures classroom activities are aimed at developing: (1) confidence through successful accomplishment; (2) language and communication skills; (3) reading readiness abilities; (4) beginning quantitative concepts; (5) health habits, sanitation and safety; (6) thinking abilities; and (7) general work habits and attitude which will allow them to benefit from group participation.
- b. Upper Primary. Pupils in this group are within the age range 9 to 13 years with mental age roughly corresponding to 5 to 9 years. The curriculum is geared towards developing academic

skills and strengthening abilities gained in the primary level. The pupils learn: (1) about his social environment; (2) adjust to his physical environment; (3) about himself, his desires, drives, and aspirations; and (4) the tool subjects, in preparation for possible integration to the regular class. Skills in the basic subject areas are taught during periods of systematic classroom instruction and through application of skills-to-life situation. Individualization of instruction has been found to be effective in this particular level. Meaningful, varied and stimulating activities such as field trips, film showing and adapted physical education, arts and music greatly help in the development of social and academic skills.

- c. Intermediate Level. Children in this group are usually within the age range of 14 to 18 years. Their mental age roughly cores correspond to 7 to 10. The academic and socializing program is continued, More emphasis is given on pre-vocational training . During this stage pupils are taught to become participating members of the family and be responsible for family activities. Most of the pupils in this level are integrated in one or more subject areas such as Home Economics for girls and Work Education or Industrial Arts for boys.

Vocational Training as an Alternative Secondary Level for the Mentally Retarded.

- a. Formal secondary education for the retarded is available only for those who can be mainstreamed. However, for those who cannot be integrated, an articulation program with the Adult and Community Services was initiated for the formal vocational training of eligible adolescent retardates as a preparation for employment and job placement. The training is geared towards equipping the mentally retarded with marketable skills for future employment in the community. Together with the out-of-school youth they are trained in handicrafts, dish washing, cooking and as supermarket aides, etc.
- b. Work centers for the handicapped were also established as terminal training centers for those children who cannot be formally trained by Non-Formal Education Services. The work centers offer training in storekeeping, sewing, plant and handicraft. The program is designed to train the children towards gainful earnings. With proper linkages and support of the non-government agencies, and civic organizations, the work centers are envisioned to progress and offer more work opportunities for the mentally retarded.

Mainstreaming of Mentally Retarded Children.

Integration in the regular classes begins in the upper primary level and is done gradually by subject area, usually starting with music and arts, physical education, and home economics, progressing to basic subjects for those who can cope with the regular grade

standards. Proper selection and orientation of the regular class teacher is mandatory to the success of mainstreaming where there is a periodic evaluation of the children's performance, and consultation with the special education teachers. A mainstreamed pupil may be sent back to the Silahis Center if there is a need for assistance in the area of his academic deficit, but is returned to the regular class as soon as it is practical. The scheme of a "center-within-a-school" facilitates such arrangements. It also makes available the resources and services of the regular school to meet the needs of the mentally retarded child.

Program Thrusts.

Salient features of the special education program for the mentally retarded includes the following:

a. Habilitative Socio-recreation.

This is a distinct aspect of special education which aims to promote physical and mental health, enhance potential social development and interpersonal relationship with peers and adult, develop realistic skills for pre-vocational training and in general achieve a well-integrated personality. Habilitative recreation, is broader in scope than ordinary recreation, for it includes activities thought of as belonging to the domain of the therapists. Project along this line are undertaken in coordination with linkages among government agencies, such as the Philippine Association for the Retarded, the National Commission Concerning Disabled Persons, the National Red Cross, the YMCA of Manila, the Jaycees and the Rotary Clubs, etc. An adapted program on sports and games, arts and music festivals, day camps and physical education are conducted to achieve the above objectives.

b. Accident Prevention and First Aid Training.

The first training of this kind for the disabled pupils of the Manila Silahis Centers, this project is undertaken yearly in coordination with the Philippine National Red Cross Youth. The activity reinforces training in personal adequacy and enhances the feeling of security.

c. Interest Clubs

In order to provide school activities similar to those enjoyed by their normal peers, the mentally retarded children are encouraged to join the Boy/Girl scouting, the Red Triangle, school choir and dance troupes and other youth organizations. The mentally retarded in the Silahis Centers participates in all the regular school's co-curricular projects.

d. Homeroom Program for the Mentally Retarded.

An aspect of the guidance and counseling program of the regular school is the training of peer facilitators or pupil leaders during the homeroom period whose primary function is to assist their classmates in encouraging the active exploration of ideas or feeling; developing awareness and openness of self; accepting differences in ideas and differences in people; giving

as to how people see themselves through self and group evaluation. Willingness to contribute ideas are also actively encouraged and mistakes are allowed as a natural part of the learning process. Teachers are assisted in demonstrating simple concepts for group discussion in a friendly and non-threatening manner. It shows that pupil leaders can also assist classmates as peer tutors. This development constitutes the innovation in the program.

With the assistance of the guidance counselors in the schools, a homeroom program was developed for the mentally retarded. The pupils in the fast learners classes were trained as peer facilitators and later on as peer tutors.

e. Parent Council for Special Education

Another aspect of the education program for the division is the organization of the Parent Council for the Exceptional Children. Membership in the council consists of the clientele of the Silahis Centers. The Council aims to promote understanding and acceptance of exceptional children. Parent education and involvement in special activities of the Silahis Centers are two of the main thrust of this organization. Through a public information and education program, the parents hope to encourage community participation and generate interest in the welfare of exceptional children. The board is composed of elected representatives from each center. Acting as the consultant is the Chief of Services assisted by the special education supervisory staff. Each Silahis Center has a satellite unit of the Parent Council to assist in planning out activities.

The following activities are undertaken to achieve the above mentioned goals and objectives:

1. Parent Conference
2. Parent Council Community Day
3. Public Information Campaign through the Media
4. Parent Community Projects
5. Coordination with the Barangay Leaders for Community Involvement
6. Cultural Shows
7. Coordination with other agencies such as the Philippine Association for the Retarded, the Philippine Foundation of the Disabled, etc.

f. Assessment Team

In order to properly screen referrals to the Silahis Centers, an assessment team composed of two special education teachers and a guidance counselor per center have intensively trained at the Manila Guidance Testing Center under the supervision of the Division Psychologist, to diagnose the mentally retarded child for proper placement or inclusion in the special education classes.

g. Pre-School Education for the Retarded

As an early intervention strategy, two experimental pre-school classes for the mentally retarded were started in one Silahis Center. The class consisted of children whose ages ranges from 6 to 7½. These children functioned on the readiness level. Curricular emphasis was on the training for self care and socialization. It was

envisioned that each center will eventually have a kindergarten class for the mentally retarded during the school year 1982-83.

h. Research

In an effort to continually improve and enrich program offerings, research became one of the most important components of the special education program. The Manila Guidance and Testing Center through its Psychological Testing Unit, work hand-in-hand with the special education supervisory staff in research projects to provide qualitative results in the special education programs.

In brief, the strategies utilized by the Division of City Schools, Manila to improve the delivery of educational services for the mentally retarded include in-service training sessions: to upgrade personnel competencies in assessing pupil potential; in managing educational activities; in evaluating and reporting pupil progress and in the wise selection and preparation of instructional materials; preparation of socio-cultural activities for program enrichment; strengthening and expansion of linkages; development of a work center; and adoption of the peer tutoring process to improve word and number literacy and attitudes, research and the operational implementation of projects designed for normalization within the framework of mainstreaming.