

ROUTLEDGE CRITICAL STUDIES IN ASIAN EDUCATION

Mapping the Terrain of Education Reform

Global trends and local responses in the Philippines

Vicente Chua Reyes, Jr.



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Mapping the Terrain of Education Reform

This book envisions the formulation of critical perspectives on education reform using the Philippine experience, recognizing the need to address relevant issues and challenges particularly in an increasingly globalized twenty-first century setting. A specific education reform project, the Leaders and Educators in Asia Programme (LEAP), a joint effort between the Philippines' Department of Education, the *Ateneo de Manila* University in the Philippines, the National Institute of Education-Singapore and Singapore's *Temasek* Foundation, serves as the analytical focus of how education reform as a globalized movement is implemented, interpreted and made sense of by stakeholders involved in the reform project. This inquiry proposes to examine the problematique of education reform—from a Philippine perspective—by focusing on three analytical starting points: (1) describing the most relevant and urgent issues of education reform; (2) diagnosing the causes and consequences of reform failures; and (3) developing critical and contextualized perspectives on reform trajectories. *Mapping the Terrain of Education Reform: Global trends and local responses in the Philippines* discusses the following:

- Challenges against effective education reforms
- The oscillation between global and local imperatives
- The dissociation between policy makers and practitioners
- Education reform aid in the Philippines

This book will be of interest to researchers interested in education policy, politics and reforms. It will also appeal to scholars examining Asian, and particularly Southeast Asian, educational systems.

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This book is dedicated to Jessica and to Emmanuel Francisco.

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Preface

An extremely important and desperately urgent problem that has haunted the Philippines for more than a century is a continuing and alarming decline in education. This book attempts to provide a comprehensive account of how an education reform initiative has tried to alleviate this very real danger that threatens not only the future of education but also the long-term sustainability of the Philippines.

In order to accomplish this, the book envisions the formulation of fresh perspectives in the critical analysis of Philippine education reform that recognizes the need to address relevant issues and challenges particularly in an increasingly globalized twenty-first century setting. It attempts to re-visit analytical paradigms that have been employed to understand the paradoxes of Philippine education, cognizant of the weaknesses of “westernized” interpretations (Ball & Maguire, 2009) and wary of generalizations based on Philippine cultural essentialism (Randolph David, 2000) and more importantly, of what Ito refers to as faulty “concepts of development” trapped in “modernist discourse” (1997, p. 98). The proposed re-examination takes the political and conflictual nature of reform (Tyack & Cuban, 1997) as starting point and would deliberately interrogate the dominant paradigm of traditional elite viewpoints (Kerkvliet & Mojares, 1991) and instead be open to complex linkages (Reyes, 2009) that underpin the unpredictable tapestry of Philippine education reform.

This inquiry proposes to examine the problematique of Philippine education reform by focusing on three possible analytical starting points: (1) describe the most relevant and urgent challenges of education reform; (2) underscore the paradoxes that characterize Philippine education reform; and (3) develop critical and contextualized perspectives on reform trajectories. In attempting to view Philippine education from the proposed analytical starting points, the experience, results and insights from the Philippines’ Leaders and Educators in Asia Programme (LEAP) would form the empirical bases. LEAP was a leadership and school improvement reform initiative for ten selected schools from the Department of Education (DepEd), School Division of Quezon City from 2008 to 2010. LEAP was a joint education reform initiative organized by the *Ateneo de Manila* University (AdMU); the

National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore and *Temasek* Foundation of Singapore.

Scholars and practitioners involved in Philippine education have at their disposal a repository of critical studies that identify the most serious challenges facing Philippine education. The landmark 1991 Congressional Commission on Education Commission (EDCOM) study, the equally influential 1999 Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER), and the 2006 Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) have comprehensively identified the obstacles that have perennially plagued Philippine education. These landmark reform studies have even suggested possible paths to transformation. Serious efforts have been placed in undertaking a critique on the state of Philippine education and how results from research studies are either ignored or are acted upon in the attempt to influence education policy and practice (Bautista, Bernardo & Ocampo, 2008; Miralao, 2004). This inquiry proposes that these Philippine-based studies need to be situated within a broader frame of education under the ubiquitous influence of globalization and neo-liberalism (Apple, 2001; Sleeter, 2008).

These studies of what ails Philippine education have employed various analytical vantage points ranging from history, political economy, organizational studies as well as sociology have generated highly contested ideas. This book engages with these emerging debates. This book is divided into three interrelated sections. **Part I**, composed of three chapters, is entitled “Problems: global trends and local responses.” The next, **Part II**, also composed of three chapters is labelled “Paradoxes: mapping the terrain of education reform.” The third and final section, with two chapters, is designated as “Promise: global and local terrain of education reform.”

Part I—Problems: global trends and local responses

Education represented by public service and schools were “early targets” of the spread of neo-liberal ideas. Reforms in the name of neo-liberal education “included increased exposure to competition, increased accountability measures and the implementation of performance goals” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254) as clear examples of the new forms of management technologies that emerged. The retreat of the traditional state and the entry of the markets saw a sharp increase in the funding of educational institutions. The neo-liberal rationale for this was based on the assumption of the immense contribution that wisdom attained through schooling can make to society for purposes of preparing the population for gainful economic participation and in the process, aid in the nation-building effort. What differentiated this neo-liberal agenda from liberalism was the subtle conversion of the value of social good: “Economic productivity is seen to come not from government investment in education, but from transforming education into a product” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). In a neo-liberal context, education is commodified to become an instrument, a technology

or even a skill-set that serves as useful currency in a society governed by the rules of demand and supply. This book argues that contemporary education reforms driven by the neo-liberal rationale has become deeply embedded in the Philippines.

Three main themes are explored in this section: What are the lingering challenges? Why do these challenges persist, what explains the cycle of continuity and discontinuity? These themes would be elaborated upon in three chapters: [Chapter 1](#), “Problematizing reform,” expounds on globalization and neo-liberalism represented by various education reforms in the Philippines. [Chapter 2](#), “Re-imagining reform,” elucidates on the dominant continuity-discontinuity and permanent crisis paradigms that have persisted as the foremost explanation of Philippine education reform. The final chapter of [Part I](#), [Chapter 3](#), “Interrogating the ‘implementation of reforms,’” deconstructs the conventional ways of explaining the implementation of reforms in education. The implementation synergy, a conceptual way to understand the implementation of reforms, is introduced in this chapter.

Part II—Paradoxes: mapping the terrain of education reform

If education reform is well prepared, relevant, and designed to address urgent and critical needs, why do obstacles to its effective implementation persist? What is it about reform that makes overcoming challenges so difficult? Current literature on education reform particularly the economics of education, political science and organization studies specifically decision engineering point to several possible reasons for the persistence of challenges to reform (Farrell, 2008). These challenges can be categorized into two broad types: (1) policy makers versus school practitioners and (2) winners versus losers. Taking cognizance of the recurring reform challenges and the resistance to change, it may be analytically illuminating to view implementing reform as adhering to implementation and “policy trajectories” (Ball, 2006). Taking note as well that reform is highly intertwined to its particular “policy context” (Ball, 2006); it may be worthwhile to conceptualize the implementation of reforms in a Philippine setting as a relationship between education reform implementation (which this inquiry argues as problematic) versus bureaucratic ambiguity (which can also be viewed as propensity towards corruption). Bureaucratic ambiguity is a characteristic possessed by the Philippine education system in general and some of its components in particular.

This section initially investigates the LEAP programme as a unique case study of education reform. The Philippines has been a recipient of education reform aid from developed countries such as Australia (Australian Agency for International Development [AusAID]), Japan (Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]), Canada (Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA]), and from multilateral agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As such, the Philippines

has been a “site” for education reforms driven by an overriding global agenda pursued by developed countries as well as multilateral agencies. More recently, a new player in the education development assistance arena in Southeast Asia has emerged—Singapore—declared in 2012 as the most globalized nation in the world. The LEAP project documented in this book manuscript is its first ever attempt to undertake education development assistance. Singapore’s approach to international education reform assistance has taken a “bottom-going-up” approach as opposed to the “top-down,” “one-size-fits-all” that characterizes education reform efforts from the West. In this regard, the Philippine education reform experience with LEAP, documented in this book becomes a unique study of an evolving mode of globalization in education reform (i.e. Western models vs. an emerging Singapore approach) and an analysis of sense-making experiences of Philippine local education stakeholders.

The second part of this section interrogates the paradoxes that emerge from education reform outcomes that have arisen from the implementation of LEAP. Three main contradictions will be explored in this section: How are technology transfers—as a form of education reform—from developed to developing nations carried out? How can the oftentimes puzzling outcomes of education reform be interpreted? From the perspectives of those implementing reform, which component is most important: leadership, the nature of the reform itself, or partnerships? These themes are elaborated upon in three chapters under **Part II**: **Chapter 4**, “Re-producing reform,” elaborates on the LEAP programme. **Chapter 5**, “Investigating reform,” probes the paradoxical outcomes of LEAP. The final chapter of **Part II**, **Chapter 6**, “Reform by the numbers,” examines how LEAP was perceived by the actors involved in the reforms in education. This chapter presents the results of a survey of LEAP participants that attempted to identify the most impactful component of education reform.

Part III—Promise: global and local terrain of education reform

This book seeks to explore three very important themes in education reform: (1) What are the challenges? (2) What are the lingering paradoxes? and (3) What are the lessons that can be learned from the reforms oscillating from global imperatives and local and contextualized needs viewed analytically from a Philippine education perspective? The book offers an opportunity to carefully scrutinize literature and the empirical data gathered from the LEAP programme. Through the interrogation of theories complemented by empirical evidence, this book provides key opportunities for critically reflecting on global and local interactions. This final section elucidates on the paradoxical outcomes derived from the quantitative analysis of reform explained in **Part II**. Qualitative case studies highlight two key themes: (1) issues and challenges facing school based management and (2) sense-making of education stakeholders in the midst of reforms.

These themes are elaborated upon in two chapters under [Part III: Chapter 7](#), “Re-storying reform,” provides a compendium of stories of leadership in the midst of reforms related by LEAP participants. For this chapter, the qualitative approach of Narrative Inquiry was employed. This is followed by the final chapter of [Part III](#) and also the conclusion for the entire book: [Chapter 8](#), “Theorizing reform: networks of (dis)trust,” proposes a fresh theoretical perspective on understanding and appreciating the complex contours of education reform at the crossroads of global trends and local responses.

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The sponsors of LEAP are several institutions who provided the resources to improve education in the Philippines, namely, *Temasek* Foundation in Singapore, the *Ateneo* Center for Educational Development (ACED) of the *Ateneo de Manila* University (AdMU) in the Philippines, the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore, and the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd).

The champions of LEAP are several key individuals who inspired and exerted tremendous efforts in ensuring that education reform move in the best direction. These champions are Fr Bienvenido Niebres, the former president of AdMU, Dr Carmela Oracion, the executive director of ACED, Dr Philip Wong, former associate dean of Pedagogical Development and Innovations of NIE Singapore, and Mr Benedict Cheong, Mr Stanley Lee, and Ms Goh Jen-Kit, chief executive officer, director, Programme and Partnerships, and associate director, Programme Management of *Temasek* Foundation, respectively.

The entrepreneurs of LEAP are the school leaders and hundreds of teachers from the participating LEAP schools in Quezon City, the Philippines, who participated in the reform programme and were willing to take risks and embrace innovative ideas in the field of education.

These sponsors, champions, and entrepreneurs were instrumental in allowing education reform to be implemented for thousands of students who belong not only to LEAP schools but to other schools in the division of Quezon City. This book is an attempt to critique and, in so doing, to map the experiences of these different stakeholders as they navigated global trends in education and their local responses in their specific contexts.

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Part I

Problems

Global trends and local responses

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