

*Curriculum Development and K-12 Challenges in the Philippines:
A Reflexive Case Analysis towards Redesigning Language and Literature
Education in College*

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Abstract

Higher education in the Philippines has been challenged to adopt changes in the curriculum given the institutionalization of K-12 basic education program in the country. In this context, faculty and administrators of higher education institutions in the country needed to take proactive measures to redesign its curriculum that would meet the need of a new generation of learners and advance the thrusts of the school. This reflective paper presents the case of Dela Salle-College of Saint Benilde's English department and a critical analysis of its efforts to reinforce and advance its curricular offerings on language and literature that would meet the K-12 challenges come academic year 2018-2019. This scholarship applied qualitative techniques to review existing empirical works and pertinent institutional documents to develop a framework that guided the department in identifying new course offerings that are K-12 compliant. Also, the paper explores on the structural implication of K-12 developments to the department's organization and the need for retooling the faculty. The discussion in this paper offers an opportunity for faculty and school administrators to reexamine and reflect on their curriculum development efforts towards meeting curricular challenges by grounding it on a sound review of literature as basis of action and informed decisions.

Keywords: college curriculum, K-12, Philippines

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Introduction

In July 2012, Republic Act 10533 or the “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013” established a new curriculum that extends basic education in the Philippines, requiring Kindergarten, and secondary education with two additional years for senior high school. With this development, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) through its Memorandum Order No. 20, Series of 2013, reformulated the general education curriculum in the tertiary level. Under the old college general education curriculum, a total of 15 units of language and literature courses were required for students to take, which were taught in English. CMO No. 20, Series of 2013, mandated a minimum of three units of communication instruction which can be taught in the local language or in English, in the new general education curriculum. It is reasoned that the language and literature courses that are part of the old college general education curriculum have been moved to the Senior High School curriculum and that remediation and redundancies are to be avoided in the new curriculum.

These changes have impact in the organization, programs and course offerings in the Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines. Consequently, the changes pose a question on how the three units of the CHED required three units of “Purposeful Communication” course that replaced the 15 units of language and literature instructions, would suffice to meet the learning needs and professional competency requirement in the 21st century. This paper reflects on the curricular efforts of Dela Salle-College of Saint Benilde’s English Area, under its school of Multidisciplinary Studies, to address the needs of 21st century learners, in the development of its required communication course and general education elective courses. This reflexive paper emphasizes on the importance of developing communication competencies of students in the new college general education curriculum.

K-12 Curriculum and Curriculum Changes in College Education

“The curriculum plays a centrally important role in designing the learner-centered school, since it is the essence of what is to be learned and the substance on which teaching, learning and assessment is [sic] based” (Dimmock, 2000, p. 76). Curriculum is defined in several ways based on the need, interest and problem that curriculum planners attend to. For Wiles, the curriculum is an outline of subject matter, plan for learning and instruction, learning experiences, and the outcomes that schools desire after instruction that is anchored on fundamental educational philosophies (2005). The curriculum is a written document that outlines the program of studies, the planned learning experiences that lead to the attainment of measurable ends which have socio-cultural and economic value to the learner when they undergo instruction (Henson, 2001).

By law, it is now the policy of the state (RA 10533) that:

“...every graduate of basic education shall be an empowered individual who has learned, through a program that is rooted on sound educational principles and geared towards excellence, the foundations for learning throughout life, the competence to engage in work and be productive, the ability to coexist in fruitful harmony with local and global communities, the capability to engage in

autonomous, creative, and critical thinking, and the capacity and willingness to transform others and one's self.”

K-12 does not only enhance basic education in the country, by extending the years of education, but it also challenges the government, the educators, the society and its institutions to develop productive and responsible citizens who are ready to face the global challenges in our contemporary world. K-12 places Philippine Educational system at par with international standards (Bologna Accord, Washington Accord, ASEAN 2015) in both the number of years of education and quality as it emphasizes on building vital competencies of the individual learners which the society and the industry need in the 21st century.

With these changes, Philippine Tertiary Education is challenged to reinvent itself by re-engineering the curriculum of all its existing academic programs. Re-engineering the college curriculum demands reexamination of the inherent principles and current practices in college education. It brings every teacher and member of the academic community into the excruciating process of giving birth to an innovative and totally new K-12 compliant college curriculum for its program and course offerings. Curriculum development, in the context of K-12 zeroes to a *tabula rasa*, thus opening creative opportunities for academic stakeholders to collaborate in the process of redesigning and reengineering college education relevant for the 21st century learners.

In redesigning the K-12 compliant college curriculum, planners and designers need to reflect on one important question: *Will the three units of CHED mandated minimum requirement of purposive communication suffice to produce that globally competitive 21st century Lasallian graduate?* Literacy is fundamentally grounded on one's ability to understand and articulate concepts. The process of knowledge construction and understanding realities in the social world is grounded on one's capacity to use language (Wittgenstein, 2002) and language is a vehicle of communication. Hence, communication teachers will need to collaborate with other academic experts, industry professionals and the school administrators to emphasize and to assert the importance of developing the communication competencies of college students across disciplines. Administrators will have to decide on the value of teaching and learning communication for its students, and aligning communication-related courses in the new program curriculum.

Curriculum Development and Innovation in Education

Curriculum development is an integral process of making changes in instruction to bring about more significant changes in the lives and experiences of the learners (Henson, 1995). Planning is needed for curriculum development, and it should involve the teachers who are in direct contact with the learners and are informed through their relevant experiences with them. Planning is for the future, but it is impossible without the knowledge of the present conditions, the students, curriculum and the available resources (Fox, 2005). The faculty of DLS-CSB engaged in the task of developing the K-12 compliant curriculum for its various program offerings. This task required teachers, administrators and the technical committee on curriculum to take a reflexive stance in determining and designing the course offerings for the College's various academic programs.

Bruner articulated the need for transforming education through developing new constructs of instruction (1990), but changes in the curriculum can be impeded by several forces: discontinuity of leadership, poor vision about change, lack of preparation to change, lack of empirical knowledge, being conditioned in a comfort zone, conflicts in vision and ambiguity of goals and insufficient resources (Bosom & Crandall, 1991; cited in Henson, 1995). At the onset of curriculum development, curriculum designers may fail to address what is really needed by the learners, the society and the industry, particularly when they are misguided or unguided in their actions through poor leadership, when they do not see the big picture of the education they wish to provide the students, when they are not equipped with the knowledge and skills in curriculum development, when they consider only what is convenient and easy for them to develop, and when they are at a blind spot to overlook the role of other disciplines and subject matter experts, and when they decide uninformed or without empirical bases and theoretical groundings.

In theory there are four types of curriculum: the general curriculum which the government or its agencies prescribe, the program curriculum which the school stakeholders develop and submitted to the government for review and approval, the implemented curriculum which translates to instruction as defined in the course syllabus, and the hidden curriculum which consist of the other learning and the implication of instruction and all the other types of curriculum but which are not defined at all (Fajardo, 2011). The curriculum's rationale presents the fundamental reason for teaching; it justifies the need for any course or subject with a logical basis as set behind particular objectives and specific content (Gunter, Estes & Schwab, 1995).

The design and implementation of the curriculum are guided by the identified learning outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Hence, the rationale is implicit of the course's desired learning outcomes specific of cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. In their model, the rationale is drafted to consider the learning needs of students for a specific subject matter that contributes to the society and the student's integration to the society. The subject matter is taught to achieve meaningful goals and objectives that are relevant to both the students and the society. The rationale of instruction clarifies the content and the objectives of teaching a particular subject that should result to meaningful learning for the students to contribute to the society. Rationalizing education is presented in figure 1.

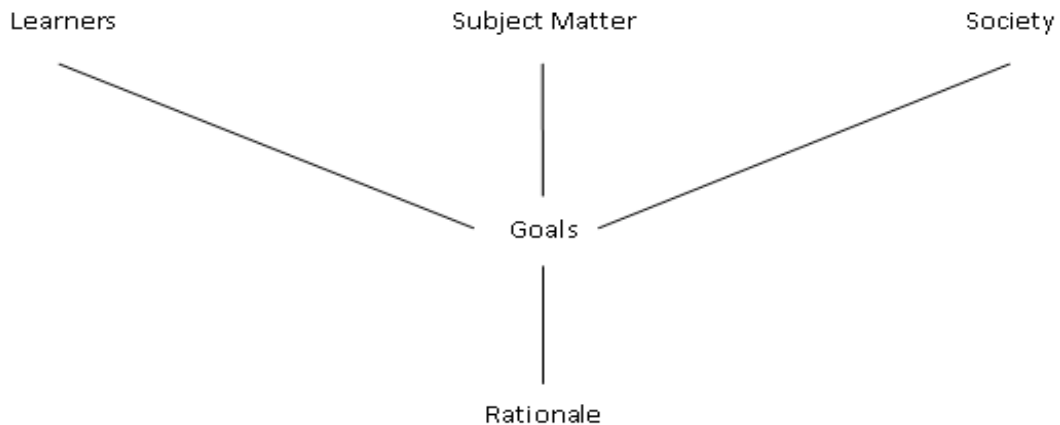


Figure 1: Contextualized Curriculum Rationale (Gunter, et.al., 1995)

Figure 1 suggests that curriculum designers should be able to justify their decision to create and offer what is necessary for the students to learn relative to the needs of the society and the industry, and the identified competencies that the General or National Curriculum prescribes and according to the philosophies and guiding principles of the school. The general education curriculum which is a menu of courses is not simply an idea lacking rationale, and it must consider interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives (CMO No. 20, series of 2013) if it seeks to produce empowered and globally competitive graduates. With the College's thrust to deliver innovative education for the 21st century learners, curriculum design today should look beyond what the school, its teachers and its learners are currently doing well with clear vision of great ideas of the future put into the practice now ("Innovation in Education", 2013).

K-12 challenges the community of college teachers to innovate and be creative. Fraser, on developing innovation in education posits that:

“There is a challenge for teachers to see the situation with fresh eyes and to engage in looking at what is possible, what is probable and what is preferable for schooling in the future. Teachers will be crucial in shaping the desirable futures for teaching and learning. This will require conceptualizing teaching as the learning profession in which teachers engage in problem identification, problem solving, analysis and research within the context of the classroom” (p.1, 2007).

Innovation in education requires the teachers' collective creativity “to bring new thinking and solutions to the problems facing education and to engage in professional and system learning” to be involved in “seeking and discovering new perspectives, which requires a problem-solving capacity and capability” and in “engaging them in problem identification and problems solving through generating, testing and developing ideas” (p.3, 2007). This implies that teachers shall perform an active role in the process of innovating education right from the beginning of curriculum development and continuing in the curriculum's implementation. Innovation is vital to

address the learning needs of 21st century learners to develop in them the necessary competencies in a globalizing world that has shifted to service orientation.

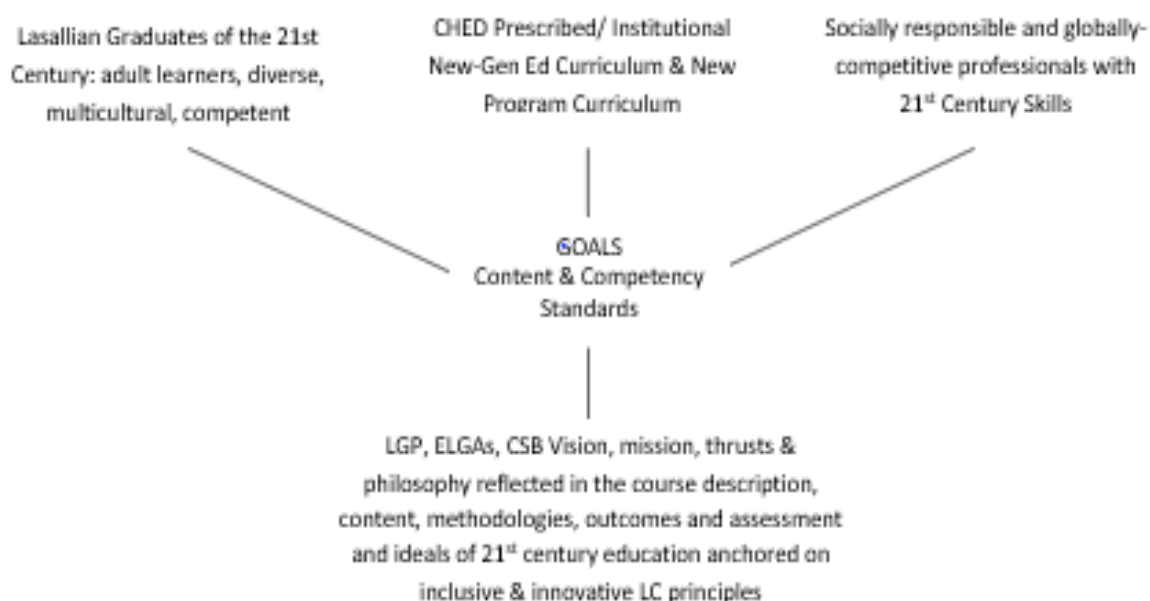


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Developing a K-12 Compliant College Curriculum

Figure 2, illustrates a curriculum with the emphasis on communication, which English Area will offer as courses that enable the students to become effective communicators who are critical thinkers, life-long learners, academically excellent and socially responsible (Rivera, 2010). These are the Expected Lasallian Graduate Attributes that the area desires for the Benildean students, and they are further extended to address 21st century job-skills demands.

While the enhanced basic education, as articulated in RA 10533 and in the implementing procedures of DepEd (Department of Education), aims to produce work and college-ready individuals, college education must seek to produce globally competitive graduates who are equipped for key professional positions in the industry, as well as strongly driven to succeed and continue higher learning. A group of academic experts and industry players identified three skills-sets expected of 21st century learners: 1) learning and innovation skills, 2) information, media and technology skills, and 3) life and career skills (www.21stcenturyskills.org, 2006).

To transform learners into effective communicators, there is collaborative commitment needed among faculty members to teach for results. The primary and the secondary graduate attributes are integrated to enable learners to acquire transferable knowledge and skills that will make them communicate competently. These attributes are understood to be fundamental in preparing students to meet the communication needs of students in their area of discipline, in their profession and in life. Thus, the graduate attributes should guide the faculty members in planning, designing and delivering instruction to be able to transform learners into effective communicators.

From Language Skills Development to Strengthening Communication Competencies

One may argue that developing communication competencies can be embedded in the specific courses of a program. However, answering to the challenge of innovating education must be evidence-based and not just data driven (Fraser, 2007) likewise, it cannot just be based on mere assumptions. Another argument could be that K-12 addresses the development of communication competencies in the enhanced basic education, but it should be understood that what is down there are the fundamental competencies appropriate for basic education and that need to advance discipline-specific communication competencies are not targeted even in the K-12 enhanced basic education curriculum (see matrix of K-12 Language Arts competencies).

The competencies expected of the 21st century graduates are evidently dependent and are influenced by the learner's ability to effectively communicate in various contexts or settings. Bradford posits that "College communication skills are the baseline methodologies that enable a learner to know how information is created, whether it is written or spoken, in any number of informational media" (2011, p.4). In K-12 context, communication courses for college students will have to be redefined in innovative ways putting into context the discipline specific competencies, with the interdisciplinary approach of developing language fluency and literary appreciation aligned to the aims of strengthening the students' core communication competencies of reading, speaking, listening, writing, viewing and using information communication technology and the contemporary media.

Bradford (2011) cites recent studies that established the importance of developing communication competencies of college students for them to function academically and to integrate and succeed in the workplace. Moneyworth (2011 cited in Bradford, 2011) found that reading, writing, emailing, speaking and listening skills of students are essential skills in any given profession (cited in Bradford 2011). Kay (2011) found that writing skills is the most highly rated skill employers wanted for their employees (cited in Bradford, 2011). Dykstra (2008) established that communication skills are important life-skills which employers seek in the ideal candidate (cited in Bradford, 2011). According to Murray (2010), communication skills are composed of four components including grammar competency, language proficiency, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatics (cited in Bradford, 2011). With these elements to be considered in the development of college students' communication competency, more communication courses should be integrated in the curriculum, and that the practice of communication skills should be embedded in the discipline-specific courses.

In a local study that correlated the grades of the CSB students in English and Math to their GPAs it was found out that the English grades of students has indirect effect to their GPA (Bacay, 2005). This implies that improvement in the students' performance in English subjects has implications in their overall performance. Thus, it can be taken from the results that communication courses which CSB offers are important in the students' academic growth. In another local study, it was found out that most teachers agree that the English area's lecture-laboratory set up should be pursued primarily because it provides more learning opportunities for students, given that they are engaged in extended learning hours, and that these extended subjects enable students to master content standards and demonstrate competency standards (Rivera & Delos

Santos, 2011). Rubin, Graham and Mignerey (1990) described that communication competency vary across the years of a college student's experience and identified that communication apprehension, communication courses, and extra-curricular communication experience are indicators of success in college.

Communication Competency across Disciplines in the 21st Century

“Communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts” (Cooley & Roach, 1984, p.25). Communication competency is a knowledge-skills set that enables the individual to effectively communicate in various situations. The National Communication Association identified ten basic competencies that college students should be able to do in terms of speaking and listening to help them in academic, professional and civic contexts: 1) State ideas clearly 2) Communicate ethically, 3) Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate, 4) Identify their communication goals, 5) Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating, 6) Demonstrate credibility, 7) Identify and manage misunderstandings, 8) Manage conflict, 9) Be open-minded about another's point of view, 10) Listen attentively (Morreale, Rubin & Jones, 1998).

21st century skills refer to transferrable knowledge that can be applied in various situations: it contains both content and procedural knowledge “to answer and solve problems”, and the core are cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies (National Research Council, 2012, p.23). *Forbes Magazine* identified 10 hireable skills, and three of these have direct associations to communication, namely critical thinking, active listening, sales and marketing (Casserly, 2012). The Harvard University Competency Dictionary (2011) defines communication as “clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message” which translates to be applicable into 24 specific job activities. Carnevale (2013) reviewed and analyzed recent O*NET findings on job demands for knowledge competencies at all occupations and found that customer and personal services and English language are pervasively in demand in 55% of all jobs in the United States. He also found out that “communications skills such as comprehension, critical thinking, speaking and active listening are skills that employers highly value” in 48% of all jobs (2013, p.8). Likewise, Carnevale describes that:

“...five out of the top twelve skills that are most valued in the economy are essentially communicative in nature. The ability to listen, interpret, follow instructions, and communicate instructions to other people, both orally and written appear time and again in various jobs – even those that require relatively lower level of education” (2013, p.8).

Global competitiveness in the 21st century requires learners to demonstrate critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and collaborative skills and communication competence, which have overlapping functions to fulfill with each other (National Education Association, 2013). Communication competencies which includes reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and extended to media and ICT literacy and stresses language proficiency and comprehension of oral and written texts, are

inarguably important 21st century skills. Developing communication competency is integral to developing collaborative skills (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). College students need ample training and time to strengthen their communication competencies to be globally competitive professionals.

Table 1: General Education Requirement across Top World Universities (Source: Recent university online prospectus)

#	Top Universities	Ranking	QS Score	World Rank	Communication & English		Arts & Humanities	
					General Education Courses	Discipline-Specific Courses	General Education Courses	Discipline-Specific Courses
1	Massachusetts Institute of Technology		100.0	1	2	2	2	6
2	University of Cambridge		99.0	3	0	0	0	0
3	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology		94.3	12	0	1	0	0
4	University of Toronto		91.3	17	2	4	0	3
5	National University of Singapore		89.4	24	2	3	2	2
6	University of Hong Kong		88.6	26	1	0	1	0
7	Australian National University		88.5	27	1	1	1	1
8	Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris		87.8	28	0	1	0	2
9	The University of Tokyo		85.7	32	2	1	2	0
10	Seoul National University		84.1	35	2	1	1	1
Average/Total			90.9	20.5	1.2	1.4	0.9	1.5
Philippine equivalent					3.6	4.2	2.7	4.5

Table 1 shows the general education requirement for communication, language, literature and arts in 10 countries around the world which top in the QS world ratings. It shows that an average these top-ranking universities in the world require their students to take general education subjects in communication, language and the arts, equivalent to 15 units of credit in the Philippines, except that of University of Cambridge in the UK. Data supports the need to emphasize communication in Philippine colleges to be globally competitive and at par with international standards.

Harvard University do not require their students to take up general education courses, but in their dictionary competencies (2012) the University identifies communication as one of its graduate competencies with identified 24 specific job applications and targeting key actions such as organizing communication, maintaining audience attention, adjusting to the audience, ensuring understanding, adherence to accepted conventions, and comprehension of communication from others.

In local setting, Ateneo de Manila extends its core curriculum from old 63 units up to 89 units, with 48 units under Humanities where 12 units are English subjects focusing on writing and literature and 3 units of modern language (Vilches, 2013). De La Salle

University is seeking to put up a School of Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies to handle general education courses. These developments in other schools suggest the value that top autonomous universities in the country are placing on communication courses as component of their general education curriculum.

The Current Challenge and Opportunities

Ocampo (2012) outlines the basic communication competencies defined in the K-12 enhanced basic education curriculum which were identified for a K-12 graduate entering the industry as skilled worker or to make them ready for college, as per the grades 1-10. Those competencies were similar to the competencies in the required communication skills course in the old Gen-Ed Curriculum. With emphasis on competency building in the integrated language arts in the K-12 curriculum, high school graduates are expected to be ready for college and the workplace. Yet, there are still many other communication competencies that are required in higher education and that of the professionals, which basic K-12 education do not address.

The integrated language arts curriculum of K-12 is basic for the skilled worker and what is expected for them in their first year of college, but they not align much to the communication competencies of professionals in the 21st century. Moreover, it shows that there are other communication competencies needed to be developed among college students, which cannot be all demonstrated upon completing the three-unit Purposive Communication course.

In table 2, only five (33%) out of the 15 domains of integrated arts learning content standards emphasizes higher order thinking skills to target metacognition. The rest targets lower order thinking skills (Bloom, Furst, Hill & Krathwoll, 1956) or those that are categorized as level 1 and level 2 objectives based in the Revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwoll, 2001; Krathwoll, 2002). The data in table 2 also inform that the integrative language arts curriculum in grades 1-10 are not job-specific, and that development of communication competencies are limited to conceptual knowledge acquisition and applications. The content standards exhibited in Table 2 for Oral Communication and Reading and Writing informs that the communication competencies that will be targeted in those domains are yet to be developed. Thus, college communication courses, in the context of K-12 must spiral the learning experience to advance the communication competencies of the learners to be professionally fit.

Table 2: Content & Competency Standards of Integrated Language Arts in Grades 1-10

Domains	Content Standards	Performance Standards	Levels of Knowing
Oral language	Understand the standards of English	Facility to understand spoken discourse and to talk with others	Conceptual and procedural application
Phonological Skills	Metacognitively understand the composition of words	Demonstrate phonological awareness in syllables and phonemes	Metacognition and conceptual application
Book and Print Knowledge	Understand knowledge of the alphabet, concepts about print, functions of print	Use literary and information texts for independent study and reading for pleasure	Conceptual application
Alphabet knowledge	Understand the features of each letter that makes it different	Recognize names, sounds of letters and write legibly	Remembering concepts
Phonics and Word Recognition	Recognize words and construct meaning about them	Use sight word recognition or phonic, analyze complex letter combinations	Conceptual application
Fluency	Understand the importance of acquiring a high level of fluency in English	Reads aloud grade level texts effortlessly without hesitation and with proper expression	Conceptual and procedural application
Spelling	Understand that words are formed with letters	Spell words with two or more syllables correctly	Conceptual and procedural application
Writing/ Composition	Understand the different formats to write for a variety of audiences and purposes	Express their ideas effectively in formal and informal compositions	Procedural understanding and metacognition
Handwriting	Understand the acceptable and comprehensible handwriting style	Write legibly in cursive writing	Conceptual and procedural application
Grammar Awareness	Understand that English language has a set of structural rules	Demonstrate grammatical awareness and communicate effectively	Procedural application
Vocabulary	Understand the importance of acquiring vocabulary	Acquire, study and use English vocabulary in various contexts	Conceptual and metacognitive application
Listening Comprehension	Understand the role of listening in comprehension	Activates prior knowledge conceptually related to texts	Conceptual application
Reading Comprehension	Understand the psycholinguistic nature of reading, and monitor one's comprehension	Nothing identified	Conceptual understanding

Attitude	Understand the significance of interpreting social meaning of linguistic varieties	Demonstrate a love for reading stories and confidence in performing literacy-related activities	Conceptual and metacognitive application
Study Skills	Understand that there are an array of study skills which may tackle the process of organizing and taking in new information and retaining information	Chooses and utilizes discrete technique and applies them to all or most field of study	Procedural application and metacognition

An innovative curriculum looks at the ideals of education, considers the future beyond what is existing for the learners, the society, and the world (Fraser, 2007). K-12 in basic education is illustrated as spiral progression of learning. The spiraling process extends to college education to meet the new industry demands. There are building blocks to learning. Literacy and numeracy, and the competency to solve problems in scientific ways are three of those essentials to demonstrate critical thinking, along with the knowledge domains of social science and humanities. 21st century skills include interpersonal skills and cultural competencies; it also stresses on media literacy and functional ICT skills. The K-12 curriculum should make a senior high school graduate ready for college and for the skilled work, but college education itself demands academic specific communication competencies for the learners to succeed, and that college education needs to develop job-specific and professional communication competencies in its graduates.

Conclusion

The institutionalization of K-12 in the Philippines came forth with both challenges and opportunities. This development put a four-year lag resulting to a decline in the College enrolment effective academic year 2016-2017. This led to the displacement of some faculty teaching general education. In a span of two years from AY 2016-2017 to AY 2017-2018, there has been a steady loss in the number of English teachers in the area. Upon implementation of the new college general education curriculum, English teachers will continuously be affected given the decline from 15 units to three units curricular offering. To this challenge, the English Area took a proactive stance to design six new courses that can be offered as electives.

Structurally, the English Area is seen to be transforming with breadth and depth. That the English Area will not be limited to emphasize language skills, speech skills, technical writing skills and knowledge of literature. It will cater to development of 21st century communication competencies along with making the experience of arts and literature more meaningful to the individual learner, the society and the world. Thus, the English Area can be seen evolving as the Communication Arts and Humanities Department which is aligned to the charge of the Commission on Higher Education for general education. It will be proactive and synergistic to integrate the development of communication competencies, literacy in the arts and literature, media and ICT literacy across the years of education of the Benildean learners.

Strengthening the communication competency of college students is more important for the 21st century profession more than ever. This is developed further in the integration of language instruction for communicative functions with emphasis on International English or Global English. The study of Literature remains important as well as this expands the knowledge of the learner on world realities and encourages creativity, imagination and critical thinking which are valuable for students think with depth, speak sensibly and expand their vocabulary while appreciating cultures and what literature contributes in human formation.

Hence, English Area developed its CHED required Purposive Communication and six general education electives. Four of these electives emphasize strengthening the students' communication competencies through and two other courses align literature instruction with the development of practical communication skills. The department will offer in its new curriculum, Intercultural Communication, Mindful Communication, Communication in the New Media, Literary Others, Literature and Popular Culture, and Art of Story Telling, as general education electives. These courses have been evaluated to meet the thrusts of the school and the required outcomes and competencies as specified by the Commission on Higher Education. Teachers have been engaged in several activities for retooling and preparation in teaching these new courses. To prepare the faculty in teaching these subjects, workshops had been scheduled for them to understand the new courses and identify effective strategies in teaching them.

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