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Experiences of LNU Neophyte Teachers: Cues for a Viable Mentoring Program

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Abstract

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Keywords

Neophyte Teachers, Mentoring, Mentoring Program, Teaching Career

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Experiences of LNU Neophyte Teachers: Cues for a Viable Mentoring Program

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The usefulness of teachers' mentoring program cannot be underestimated. Some universities and colleges in the Philippines have been implementing this kind of program with different approaches, content, and scope. The extent of mentoring programs to improve teaching careers has been studied here and abroad. Results remain inconclusive. This case study with a phenomenological peg has explored the lived experiences of neophyte teachers through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Their experiences in the first years of teaching were characterized by uncertainties, anxieties, struggles, and difficulties emanating from their lack of expertise on various aspects related to teaching practice, lack of knowledge about the culture and context of the university in which they were teaching, and lack of knowledge about the learners. With these specific inadequacies identified and the novice teachers' implicit desire to be mentored, cues for a viable neophyte teacher's mentoring program are drawn in the context of a teacher-training university. Keywords: Neophyte Teachers, Mentoring, Mentoring Program, Teaching Career

Introduction

Studies on neophyte teachers, also called Beginning Teachers (BT) and Early Career Teachers (ECT), have been conducted here in the Philippines and abroad. In a study conducted by the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA), 24% of the BT intended to leave within the first 5 years of their teaching jobs (APPA, 2006). Results generated from these studies have remained inconclusive. Unfortunately, the findings in these studies reveal the prevalence of problems and rampant attrition among neophyte teachers in their first years of teaching (Buchanan et al., 2013). This is true in Canada and Australia (Schuck, Brady, & Griffin, 2005). Another study on neophyte teacher's attrition (O'Brien, Goddard, & Keeffe, 2007) found that 29% of the teachers were keen on leaving during their second year of teaching while 10% categorically signified to leave. This situation is linked to various issues, such as adjustments to full-time teaching demands, relationship problems with colleagues and parents of students, struggles to understand the school cultural context, and failure to reconcile and close the gap between pre-service teaching expectations and the realities of in-service teaching (Fetherstone & Lummis, 2012). This phenomenon also holds true among neophyte teachers in Asia. Particularly, the Philippines is among the countries experiencing a constant turnover of teachers. Heavy workload and the feeling of not having much control over the work environment are among the reasons for quitting the teaching profession during the first years (Braid, 2015).

A study conducted in a state university in Mindanao, Philippines (Dinagsao, 2013) found that inexperienced newly hired teachers were facing many challenges. The neophyte teachers strongly expressed their need of instruction in classroom management in order to learn how to keep time and how to maintain good order and discipline in the classroom. Some of these teachers found the challenges so overwhelming that they decided to quit. This phenomenon implies that for neophyte teachers to remain in the profession, they need full support during the early phase of their teaching career. Following the same idea, Carter and

Francis (2001) assert that positive experiences among beginning teachers are closely linked to a collaborative mentoring in the workplace.

Among the countries in Asia, the Philippines was the only country with only a 10-year Basic Education Curriculum. Hence, in June 2012 the K-12 Basic Education policy was implemented. Under this program, the student has to spend 12 years to complete the Basic Education Curriculum that covers the mandatory kindergarten, 6 years of elementary education, 4 years of junior high school, and the additional of 2 years for the senior high school, (Department of Education Primer, 2012). Because of this new development back in August 2013, 61,500 teaching positions were unfilled in the Philippines. This resulted in a massive hiring of neophyte teachers who needed to be mentored on teaching strategies and techniques, classroom management, assessment of learning, and all the issues involved in the shift to the K -12 curriculum. This massive recruitment further underlines the tangible benefits and usefulness of a viable neophyte teacher's mentoring program.

The goal of this study was to look into the lived experiences of neophyte teachers from where cues for a viable mentoring program for novice teachers could be drawn. The data was collected in Leyte Normal University (LNU), a teacher-training university mandated to hone and produce as much as possible the most highly equipped teacher professionals that would eradicate the expertise gap between pre-service teacher training and in-service training, as well as the great expectations and highly demanding realities of actual teaching practice.

Despite being a teacher-training institution, every year LNU hires mostly fresh-graduate teachers who rely basically on their bachelor's degree academic experience, and their own initiatives to be able to survive in the profession. Formal and institutionalized teacher mentoring program has not yet been initiated in the university, and so findings of this study would serve as input in order to address the issue.

Review of Literature

Teaching as a Profession

Teaching is considered as the noblest profession of all times, yet unnoticed and less recognized. An important thought about teaching is that of Hunter (2016), he used to think that teaching was a job; subsequently, he considered it as a profession and finally he concluded that teaching is a very noble calling. Following the same idea and "if pressed to name the most noble profession, I would not hesitate to say teaching" (Weil, 2011, p. 1). However, these positive views and praises are not enough for retaining significant number of teachers, especially the neophyte who are performing this noble profession. In the United States, almost 25% to 40% of beginning teachers leave teaching within the first 3 to 5 years (Chang, 2009). The same trend is also being experienced in other countries around the world - Australia, China, and England regardless of the differences in their educational systems (Hong, 2010). More alarmingly, back in 2003 in Norway, Köber, Risberg, and Texmon (2005) found that only 57% of individuals with a teacher's degree were employed in the education sector. Among the different professions such as nurses, lawyers, engineers, architects and professors, there is a relatively high turnover of teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Perda, 2010), especially in the first years of experience. In many countries, one of the important issues is the lack of qualified beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005).

At the beginning of every school year, colleges and universities usually place more emphasis in the hiring and recruitment of new teachers while neglecting the necessary follow-up. There is a tendency that teachers while performing their job has experienced isolation from colleagues (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This experience can be difficult especially when after

being hired to a teaching position they are often confined in their classrooms and were made to survive on their own (Johnson, 1990; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Challenges of Neophyte Teachers

New teachers are faced with various challenges especially during the first year. According to Goodwin (2012), new teachers struggle with classroom management, curricular freedom, and unsupportive working environment. A case that may overwhelm a new teacher is how to instill discipline inside the classroom. A neophyte teacher has no experience in handling a chaotic and unruly class with students displaying misbehavior.

A good classroom management encompasses the ability to impose cooperative learning among the learners, but for a beginner teacher just to get the attention of the students is already a hard thing. Lack of support material and guidance is another issue for new teachers. They are usually faced with varied responsibilities such as curriculum preparation, lesson planning, grading, and even extracurricular activities (Fry, 2007). “Ideally, new teachers should be fully guided during the induction period but on the contrary, they are exposed to an unsupportive environment with difficult interactions with colleagues, and neglect of administrators” Fry, (2007, p. 229) and also the problem with veteran teachers who are hostile and uncooperative (Goodwin, 2012). Moreover, students have high expectations of teachers; therefore, they are expected to be equipped with varied teaching skills.

An unsettled institutional and scholarly landscape are some of the challenges that should be expected when neophyte teachers enter into university teaching context (Seddon, 2014). The academic identities of teachers are always at stake; brought about by changing institutional environment and resulted to an unclear expectations of what service they can offer as teachers (Billot, 2010; Hemmings, 2012; Seddon, 2014). Neophyte teachers experienced anxieties related to an effective teaching because of changing agenda, philosophies, expectations, and qualities (Devlin, 2006; Hemmings, 2012; Hemmings & Kay, 2010; Nyquist & Wulff, 1996; Oldland, 2011; Whelan, Smeal, & Greal, 2002),

Although it is not as rampant as in the United States and other highly developed countries, this experience of teachers’ attrition is also true in the Philippines. This is being attributed to some common reasons such as very long hours of work with low salary. A beginner teacher receives a meager monthly salary, and very often a significant portion of it is allotted for classroom improvement and learning-generation materials. As mentioned before, neophyte teachers oftentimes are deployed without follow-up support from more-experienced teachers and school officials, leaving them to survive on their own. It is relevant to investigate which factors motivate teachers to look at teaching as a long-term profession and to address the issue on frequent turnover of teachers affecting the quality of learning (Braid, 2015).

The case studies conducted by Hebert (2002) on the experiences of four first-year teachers revealed that these teachers have encountered difficulties and challenges expected for new teachers. The teachers’ struggle on learning the “ropes” of teaching as coined by the author, developing their own teaching styles, understanding the culture and how it fits into teaching strategies and classroom management, and adjusting to teaching while still maintaining some type of personal life (Hebert, 2002). Furthermore, the study concluded that teaching for the first time was extremely difficult for beginning teachers. Without the support of administrators, other teachers, especially mentors, family, and friends, it would be difficult for a beginning teacher to get through that first year of teaching. Administrators could dig deeper on operations of mentor-mentee relationships in order to meet mentoring program requirements and develop a culture supportive of mentoring processes (Pang, 2012).

Increasing Teacher's Commitment through Mentoring

Student success should always be the centerpiece and a prime agenda in every school. It is attached to the quality of teachers, and the way they mentor and guide the students. However, oftentimes this is not the case with new teachers. It is clear that the little experience an education student has acquired from his/her undergraduate degree is not really enough to become an effective teacher. That is why a mentoring program could be a good investment of schools and education officials and a good move to improve and equip new teachers with right skills, attitude, and knowledge, thereby ensuring student success.

Mentoring is a relationship formed between a less experienced individual called the mentee that serves as the recipient of the intervention and the mentor who is expected to be a more experienced individual (Packard, 2003). The role of the teacher-mentor is to assess the teaching skills and provide support to the beginning teacher in a formal relationship (Education Commission of the States, 1999). A mentor is simply defined as a veteran teacher who act as adviser, teacher, coach, or buddy who helps the beginning teacher develop into a seasoned veteran. The mentor is the one who has the command in the relationship and the success of a mentoring program is largely dependent on him/her. The noble intentions of mentoring state that “inducting new teachers to the school environment—this includes introductions to colleagues and other staff of the school, familiarization with physical settings, as well as integration into the working culture, norms and practices within the community of teachers” Tedder and Lawy (2009, p. 413). A mentor should support the new teacher by exemplifying good practices, techniques, and strategies like making it known the materials and references that can be used in teaching (Alleman, 1986).

Psychological and instruction-related supports can be provided to beginning teachers through mentoring (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). The personal and emotional needs of beginning teachers is being addressed by the psychological support while the need associated to teaching activities can be addressed by the instruction-related support.

Many studies have claimed that support and assistance for beginning teachers had positive impact to improving teachers' commitment and retention and subsequently improved their teaching performance (Hastings, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Mutchler, 2000; Seddon, 2014). Mentorship promises to help beginning teachers in different aspects (a) transition into the classroom, (b) career enhancement as an avenue for leadership, (c) public recognition, (d) professional development, and (e) program innovation (Little, 1990 as cited in Mutchler, 2000).

Mentorship is also being practiced in African countries. In Zimbabwe for example, the origin of mentorship date back to 1980 when the concept of apprentice teachers being placed under the supervision of veteran teachers was introduced. After conducting a study on challenges and prospects for school-based mentoring, Mafumbate and Musingafi (2014) concluded that “mentoring is an exercise whereby an experienced teacher takes the father and consultant role to a student teacher attached to him/her, and in ideal situations such student teacher would not have an independent teaching load as the student teacher and the mentor would take turns in teaching whilst the other is observing and critiquing the teaching and learning process” (p. 37).

The Republic of China, where education is considered as a prime commodity, has a unique experience in teacher's mentoring programs. In most cases, mentoring is facilitated on a one-on-one session; but particularly in Shanghai, group mentoring is also practiced. Group mentoring involves not only teachers but also principals. New teachers can be helped by sharing ideas based on their experiences and practices, when they discuss issues and conducting teaching-related researches (Salleh & Tan, 2013).

Viability of a Teacher Mentoring Program

Mentoring and induction programs are geared toward improving teacher socialization, adjustment, development, and assessment while contributing to the overall goal of improving the performance and retention of beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser 2001; Ganser, 2002). Some programs are developmental and evaluative in nature and are designed not only to facilitate improvement for the beginners but also to eliminate those that are not fit for the job (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Mentoring is a complex process. There is no definite design that fits in all types of mentoring program. Mentoring is designed according to the preferences of the individuals involved, the environment, and the present situation. Mentoring is complex because its holistic nature (Ambrosetti, 2014). He also believes that this complexity is likened to the understanding that mentoring is a reflective activity, connected to attitudes and practices towards the latter. Mentoring is also faced with challenges. On the mentor's side, this could be perceived as an additional burden on top of his daily routine and responsibilities, especially in the first years of mentoring (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005). Moreover, the dilemmas of mentors when interacting with new teachers is on how to properly address the identified weaknesses, either to give constructive criticism or not just to avoid hurting the new teacher's feelings (Ambrosetti, 2014).

Selection of Effective Mentors

Mentor teachers are seen to have critical roles in guiding and molding new teachers; therefore, they should be carefully selected. The mentor's effectiveness ultimately determines to what extent mentoring programs will support new teachers. Mentors should possess valuable aptitudes with a track record of fostering student learning gains in a significant way (Barlin, 2010; Hastings, 2007). Mentors can be either helpful or extremely helpful in the aspect of instruction, in creating a comfortable relationship, and in completing the requirements of the beginning teachers' program (Hastings, 2007).

According to The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE) (1999), a good mentor is open minded and has the willingness and commitment to serve as a model to the beginner teacher; should possess professional competence and rich knowledge which could be readily adapted by the mentee; should have good communication skill and the ability to articulate or formulate professional critiques that would create a positive perspective; and should have good interpersonal skill which could propel a successful mentoring via establishing and creation of a trusting and mutual relationship between the mentor and the mentee.

According to Nakamura and Shernoff (2009), professionals in general are inclined to mentor when they have domain in their respective fields, and in the community. When mentors felt the strong sense of responsibility, it motivates them to help the new teachers to grow and succeed in their chosen profession (Schulze, 1995). Likewise, good and fulfilling mentoring experience and relationship in the early stages of the career may also serve as motivation to mentor. (Garza, Ramirez, & Ovando, 2009). Beginning teachers and mentor work hand-in-hand in the mentoring process in developing essential teaching skills and providing emotional support (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Lai, 2005).

Research Questions

This research sought to document the lived experiences of neophyte teachers. The conduct of this study was guided by the two major research questions below:

1. What are the actual experiences of neophyte teachers in a teacher-training university?
2. What possible experience-based cues could be recommended for a viable neophyte teacher's mentoring program in a teacher-training university?

Theoretical Framework

Growth in induction and mentoring programs have been addressed in both local and foreign empirical studies (Wang, Odell, & Clift, 2010). These were focused on identifying the kinds of induction and mentoring programs; and in understanding under what cultural context and environment, these programs are most helpful and successful. There is an underlying assumption that mentoring and induction programs vary on impact and outcomes in various social milieus, thereby bringing to light the viability concern of mentoring programs in divergent settings.

This study hinged from the mutual benefit model developed by Zey (1984), drawn from the social exchange theory. Zey (1984) points out that in the university setting the mentor and mentee enter into a relationship in order to meet certain needs, and the relationship continues for as long as the mentees and mentors continue to benefit from each other. Various studies (Britton, Paine, Raizen, & Pimm, 2003; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Strong, 2009; Tomlinson 2009) used the mutual benefit model as framework. The said model used teacher induction and teacher mentoring interchangeably. The studies of the above authors using the same model suggested elements to compose a neophyte teacher mentoring program to include orientation sessions, conversations with faculty colleagues, conference meetings with supervisors, capacity building workshops, workload reduction, one-to-one classroom assistance and mentoring sessions. These studies used teacher induction and teacher mentoring program interchangeably.

The mentoring model introduced by Thorpe and Kalischuk (2003) was also used as basis for this study. This model gives emphasis on how to create an honest and open interactions between the mentor and the mentee by taking into consideration both the external factors that have an impact on the mentor – mentee relationship such as social, political, and cultural aspects of the institution and the inherent factors such as the essence of time spent, the kind of environment and the communication between the mentor and the mentee for the mentoring relationship to grow (Campbell, 2011).

Teacher mentoring programs have evolved through the years. The “second generation mentoring model” which was developed in 1998 by the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association is a more structured and formal program. The model requires collaboration between school administrators and teachers; better preparation by new teachers; longer mentoring period; addressing issues that affects the performance of new teachers; abiding mutual agreements and policies to foster integrity; maintaining high standards of professionalism and upholding the principle of confidentiality of the mentoring relationship (The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1999)

Time is considered a significant factor that contribute to the effectiveness of mentoring. On the mentor's point of view, the greatest challenge is finding enough time to become effective in the mentoring exercise (Ganser, 1995). Time constraints can make mentoring very difficult and good mentors are those who knows how to value time and can stay longer for the job (Rowley, 1999).

Emerging from the lived experiences of beginning teachers, the cues for a viable neophyte teacher's mentoring program may match with a particular mentoring model mentioned above or may fit in combination of two or more models described above, crafted to fit to cultural and social environment of a teacher-training university.

Methodology

This is a case study with a phenomenological peg, in which we documented the lived experiences of neophyte teachers in a teacher-training university. This study looked for an in-depth understanding of their day-to-day life as beginning teachers. This section describes the research design, research setting, participants, sampling procedure, research instruments, and data collection procedure. The qualitative research method was deemed suitable for describing the lived experiences of neophyte teachers in greater depth rather than using the quantitative research method which only generates a surface description from a large sample of a population. By resorting to the qualitative research inquiry, this allowed the examination of issues and problems of novice teachers in-depth which in turn provided a clearer understanding of what is happening in their day to day lives in a particular university. Useful insights derived were the bases for recommending changes and cues to meet, solve, and improve the existing difficult circumstances of the early career teachers in the university. The insights generated from the in-depth understanding of the neophyte teachers to improve the plight of the same were very vivid and concrete compared to results experienced in statistics to describe such experiences (Lichtman, 2012).

Research Design

This paper utilized a case study design with a phenomenological peg because it was focused on understanding the deeper meaning of the neophyte teachers' experiences (Merriam, 2009). According to Yin (2003), a case study design is more appropriate when the focus is more on describing the phenomenon and contextual conditions under study such as the experiences of neophyte teachers in a teacher-training university and the process do not allow to manipulate the behavior of those who are involved in the study. Phenomenology, for its part, is the study or inquiry into how things appear, are given, or present themselves to us in pre-reflective or lived experience (van Manen & van Manen, 2012). The phenomenological analysis highlights the views of the participants' understanding on "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" Schwandt, (2000, p. 192).

This case study with a phenomenological peg helped in understanding the everyday experiences of neophyte teachers, their challenges, and cope with the new work environment.

Research Setting

This study was conducted at the state-run university of Leyte, located at the heart of Tacloban City, Philippines. It was founded in 1921 as a 2-year teacher-training school, and in 1952, it became a 4-year degree-granting college. Years later, in 1995, the school officially became a state university, mandated to produce top performing professionals equipped to engage on knowledge and technology production, which are necessary factors to develop a sustainable society (LNU vision and mission). LNU has recently turned 95 years offering 35 curricular programs, where most of the programs have attained a Level III Reaccredited Status by the Accrediting Agency for Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines. The average enrolment of the university including the elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate, and levels ranges from 6,500 to 7,000 per year. Approximately 50% of the student population is enrolled in education programs both in the undergraduate and graduate level. Over the last 2 decades, the Commission on Higher Education has awarded LNU the title of Center of Excellence for Teacher Education, which renders it as one of the top reputable teacher-training universities nationwide. As the biggest teacher-training university in the region, LNU supplies 80% of the qualified teachers.

Research Participants

Unlike first-world countries where teacher attrition is rampant, teachers in the Philippines hold on to their jobs despite hardships and difficulties as unemployment rate is high. Senior teachers are expected to train, hone, and polish the skills of prospective teachers. Thus, the importance of a study on teacher mentoring program cannot be sidelined. LNU has a total of 133 faculty members, 17 of whom have taught at the university for more than 20 years and are considered senior teachers. The largest percentage-66%, has been teaching in a range of 6-19 years, while 28 teachers which accounts for the 21% of the faculty is considered beginning teachers.

This study has completely and strictly adhered to the prescribed and ethical mandates in conducting researches. To comply with these rules, the identity such as names of the participants (neophyte teachers) were not specified in order to avoid future dilemma. The responses and stories that were encoded and printed both in the focus group discussion and individual interviews were kept with utmost confidentiality and assurance was initiated that the data were for such purpose only.

Sampling

The research population of this study included all 28 beginner teachers at LNU. Since the main goal was to gain an in-depth account of experiences of the neophyte teachers, six participants were purposively identified and selected based on the following characteristics: less than two years of service at LNU, and are assigned in the different academic units of the university. Two of the respondents were newly hired with only one semester experience; three of them were relatively new with two semesters work experience while one participant had more than a year of experience.

Description of Participants

Respondents	Date of hiring	No. of years/months of teaching experience at LNU	Academic unit assignment
Neophyte teacher 1	June 15, 2014	1 year/9 months	Mathematics unit
Neophyte teacher 2	June 15, 2015	9 months	Information Technology and Computer Education unit
Neophyte teacher 3	December 7, 2015	4 months	Science unit
Neophyte teacher 4	June 15, 2015	9 months	Professional Education unit
Neophyte teacher 5	January 4, 2016	3 months	Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health (MAPEH) unit
Neophyte teacher 6	June 15, 2015	9 months	Integrated Laboratory School (ILS)

One important fact is that the selected neophyte teachers were not solely graduates of LNU rather graduates of other non-teaching universities were included, with the purpose of having the point of view of neophyte teachers who are products of non-teaching higher

education institutions. This expands and increases respectively the generalizability and acceptability of the findings of this study.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

This study made use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) guide to obtain significant information from the lived experience of neophyte teachers. Before the FGD started, all the six participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and were given a chance to finally decide whether to participate or not in the study with their written consent. Prior to the conduct of the activity, three teachers were invited for the pilot testing of the FGD guide questionnaire. There was only one FGD meeting and lasted for about one hour, while the one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasted for not more than 10 minutes in order to effect utmost comfort and thus high response objectivity among the participants. The FGDs and the interviews were recorded.

After the data collection was done, the audio recordings were carefully transcribed by the researchers. In order to avoid errors on the data transcription and to ensure the accuracy of the ideas, the researchers followed a member checking process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was performed employing Colaizzi's (1978, as cited in Sanders, 2003) strategy in descriptive phenomenology. This phenomenological method of inquiry stresses on issues of rigors and trustworthiness in order to arrive at a decision relative to the themes of lived experiences of people (Sanders, 2003). There are seven steps in this process of data analysis: (a) reading, understanding, and transcribing the respondents' descriptions of the experiences; (b) formulating the significant statements; (c) generating the formulated meanings from the significant statements; (d) organizing the cluster of themes; (e) developing an exhaustive and extensive descriptions; (f) creating the essential structure of the phenomenon; and (g) allowing validation of the results of analysis by the participants.

Reflexivity

Employing the phenomenological approach for this study has paved the way for the researchers, administrators, superiors, and colleagues to listen and acquire empathy on the life of neophyte teachers in a teaching university.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of this study in the form of seven main themes extracted from the lived experiences of neophyte teachers, using the Colaizzi's strategy in descriptive phenomenology. These themes are (a) feelings of neophyte teachers, (b) issues and problems faced by neophyte teachers, (c) coping mechanisms/strategies of neophyte teachers, (d) cues for conducting administrative and academic orientation, (e) cues for the enhancement of neophyte's expertise, (f) cues for establishing relationship with university stakeholders, and (g) cues for the choice of mentors.

Theme 1. Feelings of the Neophyte teachers

The neophyte teachers in this study were asked about the feelings they experienced during the first days, weeks, and months of teaching at LNU. Feelings of anxiety, fear, pressure, tense, and feelings of being burdened and demoralized dominated the evocative responses of the new teachers. The six participants aptly described what and how they felt during the first few months of their teaching work.

Significant Response 1. *“In the first day I was so conscious on how I will introduce myself to them. It was really like a risk for me to face them because I really don’t know what to do, how to deal with them although before I applied here, I taught at another private college.”*

Significant Response 2. *“It was a bit scary although my colleagues guided me.”*

Significant Response 3. *“I prepared so much because I was apprehensive to impress my students.”*

Significant Response 4. *“I was worried because I don’t know how to impose disciplines among my students.”*

Significant Response 5. *“I was having difficulty looking for the materials for my laboratory class because I’m new to the school setting. I could not find my way around where the materials were kept in the lab.”*

Significant Response 6. *“Being a neophyte there are many struggles indeed. I am struggling and feeling burdened because of many teaching loads and subjects.”*

Significant Response 7. *“A parent one day came to my office. He confronted me saying: Mr. neophyte where are the grades of my child. You need to finish it. I felt becoming small, kind of demoralized. The parent was forcing his authority on me.”*

Significant Response 8. *“It is very hard to be a neophyte. I was very much overloaded that time. I would teach kids from 7:30-4:00 no break time. After 4:00 p.m. onwards I would teach college students. One day I was already having seizures because of hunger so that I asked a pupil to buy snacks for me.”*

Significant Response 9. *“Honestly I am really frustrated because I really wanted to engage in research because there are people who are really enjoying doing it. When they are talking about research, I don’t know what they are saying.”*

As the responses of the neophyte teachers pointed out, some of the reasons for these feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty are the (a) lack of knowledge and skills, (b) unfamiliarity with academic and administrative policies, and (c) lack of information about pupils and students and the school/university where they are teaching. These aspects contributed to the feelings of being overburdened and demoralized during their early years of teaching.

The above findings are aligned with Goodwin (2012) when he asserts that new teachers struggle with classroom management-how to instill discipline inside the classroom, burdened by curricular freedom and sinking in unsupportive working environments. It seems that neophyte teachers face big challenges in handling a chaotic and unruly class. According to Buchanan et al., (2013), the pervasiveness of problems describes the first few years of the neophyte teachers' career. These teachers were keen on leaving their careers due to various issues and adjustments. However, the above phenomenon could be avoided by providing the novice teachers with effective support through a mentoring program.

Theme 2. Issues and Problems Faced by Neophyte Teachers

Neophyte teachers face numerous issues and problems during their first months and year of teaching. Gleaned from their stories and experiences, this section presents some of these issues.

Significant Response 1. *“The context in this university is far different from the school where I taught. I asked about the culture of the university from my colleague.”*

Significant Response 2. *“I did not know how to deal with kids. It is really different when handling kids because I handled high school kids before.”*

Significant Response 3. *“It’s more on the administrative part. I don’t know how much I will be getting, how many I will be teaching, how many students in a class and the work clearance I have to get.”*

Significant Response 4. *“I was worried of my relationship with students. I have a hard time figuring out what persona to take in the classroom whether to be strict or lax.”*

Significant Response 5. *“In my class, struggle is increasing because problems are starting to unfold. My struggle is to know my identity as a teacher and as an employee. Will I be an employee or a teacher? There are other functions that a teacher should do. You are given a task here; these tasks need much time. I really need to prepare everything for my students but sometimes my other tasks would be asking more time compared to preparing lessons.”*

Significant Response 6. *“There are many tasks to be done at the same time. I am not used to it. I have a hard time prioritizing what stuff I need to start first.”*

Significant Response 7. *“There are many functions of a teacher. This one is for instruction, this one is for research, this one is for my STE (Supervising Teacher Educator) another paper is for community extension, so we have different files.”*

Significant Response 8. *“I had trouble with time management because I was given 30 units of teaching load for 5 subjects and 5 different preparations.”*

Significant Response 9. *“When I was new it was adjustment period. I don’t know how to handle a class without a course syllabus. So I need to ask help.”*

That time there was a revision with the syllabus of that subject so there was no hard copy of the syllabus and I don't know how to make one."

Significant Response 10. *"When I was in my first year of teaching I was given an extra load with different sets/classes with students of different major fields, so I had to make revisions of the syllabus to fit to these learners."*

Significant Response 11. *"My main problem was making students submit their requirements on time. How to make them follow you. I think child psychology is an important topic for a teacher."*

Significant Response 12. *"I don't really know what approaches to teaching I am using and I am going to use because what I know are approaches to language teaching not teaching professional education. Another problem is with grading system, assessment and giving examination and test to my students. I am not sure how many items in my test and what type of test. My Dean says, not more than 50 items selection type test. My colleagues said it is ok for 100 items or more I don't know what and whom to follow."*

Significant Response 13. *"I really need to establish good relationship because I am new, but I could not avoid trouble because I was not aware of the rules."*

Significant Response 14. *"I was teaching one Principles of Teaching subject to two sets of students from different degree programs so while I know expertly for my own degree program I did not know well the principles for another degree program."*

Significant Response 15. *"When it comes to the delivery of content I don't have a problem but what is difficult are the approaches and strategies to teach specially the module approach. I don't have knowledge what approach am I going and what method will I use to deliver the topic."*

Significant Response 16. *"In the university there are many factors to consider how I will deal with parents-the pressure with demanding parents. One parent came to me forcing an answer for her daughter to be given a passing mark in the special project defense."*

Significant Response 17. *"In the beginning there are reservations and I have to be very careful as to how I present myself to my co-teachers. I have to be careful with my words so as not to offend them."*

Significant Response 18. *"And so sometimes I would be asking some help from people because I don't know research. I want to engage in research because some people are enjoying it while I don't know. If they are talking about research I don't know what they are saying."*

Significant Response 19. *"I have a problem with my being a web administrator and as a teacher, who is my direct supervisor? Or do I have to report to both."*

Apart from their lack of knowledge of their students and the university, lack of experiences in disciplining students, and the lack of awareness on academic and administrative policies, neophyte teachers also face problems due to their multiple roles. So many tasks and functions interfere with their teaching functions. Some of the teachers expressed they were assigned five teaching loads, which requires much preparation. As stated in response #9, one of the participants was desperately borrowing a syllabus because he did not know how to prepare one.

Another neophyte teacher was forced to adapt the syllabus of one subject for different sets of learners coming from various degree programs. Knowing what strategies and approaches to take to deliver the subject matter, also forms part of the neophyte teachers struggle. In addition, a lack of knowledge and skills on how to test and assess learning outcomes was identified. The response #12 clearly shows the dilemma a neophyte teacher had to face by not knowing who he should follow. This teacher was confused with the different suggestions regarding the number of items for a specific test type; and in another case, the teacher had two different supervisors, which created confusion. Furthermore, dealing with highly demanding parents is a major issue neophyte teachers grapple with, as indicated by two of the participants when parents barged into their classrooms to demand on matters relative to the grades of their children. Finally, the neophyte teachers were most concerned on building good relations with students, superiors, and with their colleagues.

As mentioned in the introduction, beginning teachers have to deal with various issues during their first years in the profession: such as adjustments to full-time teaching demands, relationship problems with colleagues and parents of students, struggles to understand the school cultural context, and failure to reconcile and close the gap between pre-service teaching expectations and the realities of in-service teaching (Fetherstone & Lummis, 2012). These are the same problematic circumstances neophyte teachers are experiencing in this particular study. One of the determinant of early career teacher's satisfaction is the culture of the school (Schuck, Brady & Griffin, 2005). Critical for the new teachers to cope with the rigid challenges in the profession is a supportive and encouraging culture and work environment. Important recommendations to overcome some major difficulties experienced by beginning teachers are (a) participate in structured induction or mentoring programs, (b) the teaching load should not be too heavy, (c) collaborate with trained mentor teachers, and (d) close partnerships with teacher education institutions (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Theme 3. Coping Mechanisms/Strategies of Neophyte Teachers

In spite of many issues and problematic situations encountered by the neophyte teachers, there are various coping mechanism and strategies they used to overcome their challenges. The following are some of the significant responses that show these coping mechanisms.

Significant Response 1. *“Pero I can still manage; I was trained to be flexible.”*

Significant Response 2. *“I asked the course syllabus from the former teacher.”*

One of the participants was assigned with multiple tasks which resulted in a very busy schedule. The strategy he used to cope with the hectic schedule was to distribute responsibilities among the students, such as allowing them to teach some lessons.

Significant Response 3. *“Since I need help in my teaching work I tap my practice teachers by asking them to teach with some topics.”*

Significant Response 4. *“I have become dependent of asking help from my co-teachers in the university.”*

Significant Response 5. *“I asked help from my Dean and colleagues. But their opinions sometimes differ.”*

Significant Response 6. *“I prepare my lesson ahead of time during the weekends.”*

Significant Response 7. *“I work from evening ‘till dawn to cope with teaching requirements.”*

Significant Response 8. *“While doing some other tasks, I give my class an activity so I can do my other administrative tasks.”*

Significant Response 9. *“Most often I just ignore problems relative to demanding and irate parents and let the problem solve for itself. I ignore problems on difficult parents I divert my focus on other jobs.”*

Significant Response 10. *“I ask the help of colleagues who are much older than me for some lessons.”*

Significant Response 11. *“I would ask the help of other teachers who have taught the course and I feel so blessed that they lend me their materials”*

Significant Response 12. *“I also ask the help of other colleagues in other academic units”*

Another participant borrowed a course syllabus from a colleague who had taught the same subject before. In assessing student academic performance one of the participants asked some help from the dean and other colleagues. Dealing with highhanded parents, the neophyte teachers asked some tips from a senior colleague. Colleagues and co-teachers were therefore a constant source of help among the neophyte teachers. While some neophyte teachers resorted to colleagues as lifelines, there were those who chose to solve the problems by themselves. They focused on managing time to prepare lessons in advance and working overtime without sleep; whereas, another participant chose to ignore the problems and redirected his focus on other jobs. These testimonies are related to the experiences of newly appointed teachers in a rural area of Western Australia. According to Sharplin and Chapman (2011), these beginning teachers in Australia articulated coping strategies along direct-action, palliative, and avoidant strategies when confronted with stressful issues and concerns during their first years of work. In this study, neophyte teachers who sought help from colleagues to solve their problems used direct-action coping mechanisms. Those who chose to ignore the problem used avoidant coping strategies; while some of the participants used palliative actions by managing time well and doing overtime work.

It was noteworthy that senior colleagues were a constant source of help for the neophyte teachers in the study. Early career teachers find it easier to adjust with the demand of the job when they were shared with the expertise and resources by the experienced senior colleagues. There has to be sharing of new knowledge, insights and ambiance that is welcoming and boosts the morale of the new teachers (Buchanan et al., 2013). For the implementation of a teacher-

mentoring program in this particular university; colleagues, particularly the senior faculty members, could be tapped as effective mentors.

Theme 4: Cues for conducting academic and administrative orientations for neophyte teachers

A big question that it often posed by neophyte teacher is how prepared they are to begin teaching. After being recruited, hired, and positioned, new teachers need to become acquainted with the school culture, they need to be told how things are done (Carver, 2003). According to the participants in this study, the orientation for beginning teachers should emphasize more on academic and administrative policies, which are necessary to fully exercise the teaching profession.

Significant Response 1. *“I’m still asking some questions because I’m scared actually if I will do something wrong especially that we all know about Child Policy Laws.”*

Significant Response 2. *“I don’t know how many I will be getting or I will be teaching. I don’t know how many students, classes to give me or where my classrooms will be.”*

Significant Response 3. *“No one explained to me clearly what’s the rule if they don’t pass their assignments on time. What if they copied something but just a little, little passage? Will I let it go, or will I send them to the Guidance?”*

Significant Response 4. *“Say for example 100 items the passing is 50 but if 40 it’s still passing-something like that, so I’m really confused who to follow and so we really need orientation to all of us for it to be standardized.”*

Significant Response 5. *“I dismissed my class 5 minutes before the time and the teacher was waiting outside because I’m not aware of the rule. I really need to be conscious with the rules because sometimes it’s causing misunderstanding most especially in my case that I am new.”*

Significant Response 6. *“I had that revision on the grading system because I used 75 and then only few passed then I asked the unit chair and he said the passing is only 40.”*

Participants in this study were not fully aware of the fundamental university policies, such as the grading system, teaching loads, room assignments, changes in class schedules, students’ behavior, class duration and time allotment, relevant memoranda, and syllabus preparation. These are clear manifestations of lack of orientation on the academic policies and processes in the university.

Significant Response 7. *“I did not know the university is holding a flag ceremony, so I was there 7:30 waiting for students, I was surprised no one is coming.”*

Significant Response 8. *“I said to myself oh my mother and father what are these requirements and I don’t all these. DO I Have to get SSS, GSIS,*

PhilHealth, TIN. So, it's really good if somebody will orient us that okay before you enter LNU you need to prepare these things"

Significant Response 9. *"The hierarchies who to contact if Sir Gab is not around or who to contact if Dr. Lara is not around, it's really the organizational, Yes."*

The neophyte teachers were not familiar of the basic administrative arrangements and policies of the university, such as attendance during flag ceremony, location of facilities, equipment, and employment requirements. It also reveals that the neophyte teachers were not oriented on the hierarchical positions of the school.

Theme 5. Cues for the enhancement of neophyte teachers' expertise

Knowledge on how to teach adolescents and meeting the demands unique to their specialization is what experts in teaching content area would like to pursue (Borko, 2004; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). An effective teacher is expected to be expert in his or her field. According to Solis (2009), being able to teach effectively the students indicates that teaching really matters and that teachers do also learn from it. The teaching-learning process inside the classroom depends on what the teacher would be able to impart to the students.

Significant Response 1. *"I've been teaching Principles of Teaching, but my subjects here are Child and Adolescents, Educational Technology which is far different from the Principles of Teaching."*

Significant Response 2. *"I was given subjects in Math, I was also given subjects in Computer. In Math I am already confident, but I need to adjust in Computer."*

Significant Response 3. *"Somehow I can say that I am blessed in a way when I look at the book I know already know the topic since it is Elementary the Math-no problem but with regards to Science I need to read a little."*

Neophyte teachers in this study do not claim to be experts in the subject areas they are teaching. One of the cited reasons is that very often they are assigned to teach subjects that are not their specialization; and that requires extra effort and time. This requires effective professional enhancement that is expected to provide the teachers with the important elements such as collaborative learning, links between curriculum, assessment and professional-learning decisions in the context of teaching specific content, active learning, deeper knowledge of content and how to teach it, and sustained learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Deeper knowledge of the content and how to teach it are important factors to consider because training teachers solely anchored on new techniques and behaviors will not work (Vega, 2015).

Another test that a neophyte teacher should hurdle is to be able to impose good classroom strategies, which encompass instilling classroom discipline, teaching strategies, classroom management, and testing strategies.

Classroom discipline is a very important ingredient to the effective teaching-learning process. A classroom climate conducive to learning is still considered as a primary requirement to learning compared to a supportive environment and behavior. These factors were given less attention and focus, however classroom discipline consumes the quality time and efforts that

are needed by the learners in attaining success (Mendler, 2014). The respondents shared their experiences on classroom discipline.

Significant Response 1. *“I asked advice coming from my colleagues with regards to how are you going to present yourself to them and they told me that you should be strict, but not really too strict.”*

Significant Response 2. *“How am I going to impose discipline like how will I attract them to listen to me and how will I get their attention so that they will look at me. I need to be expressive.”*

The neophyte teachers show difficulty in imposing discipline inside their classrooms. It was stressed by the respondents that as new teachers they are still dependent on the inputs and advices from colleagues. The teachers appreciated the responsibility of disciplining the students, but they still need guidance on how to implement it in class.

Part of the discussion in this study was about the teaching strategies employed by the neophyte teachers in the short period that they have been teaching in the university. Typically, it is not expected that a neophyte teacher displays excellent teaching strategies; as this skill is oftentimes attributed to years of experience. This theory was attested by the actual experiences of the neophyte respondent teachers.

Significant Response 1. *“I don’t really know what approach, what am I trying to apply to my students because we studied approaches in teaching, but not teaching in general because its Professional Education subject.”*

Significant Response 2. *“I have 20 plus Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and then another 20 plus BSED. And then we all know that the approach in BEED and BSED is different. And so I was almost unable to finish my subjects because I have to give situations.”*

Good classroom management is equally important as strategies in promoting a productive teaching learning process. Dealing with problems on classroom management can be the most pressing challenge for teachers (Axelrod, 2012). It is given that there is no single strategy that would fit to the varied situations inside the classroom, therefore, a teacher is expected to adapt and implement a variety of classroom management strategies.

Significant Response 1. *“I graduated BSED major in Mathematics not BEED so I was really nervous so it was really like a risk for me to face these kids, because I really don’t know what to do.”*

Significant Response 2. *“I’m not saying that I’m ignorant with regards to managing, that time I don’t know how will I manage my practice teachers. I need more like help with regards to adjusting time”*

Significant Response 3. *“My difficulty, how to make them follow your instructions and how to know-how to be able to make them follow you, yes it’s psychology.”*

Significant Response 4. *“You must be creative in handling kids because if you are not creative they will be sleepy, they will sleep, they will be noisy. You really need to be patient, firm.”*

The neophyte teachers were confronted with different situations and experiences that have tested their ability to handle challenges in classroom management. Some teachers, especially those who are teaching college students, find it helpful to deal with the situations with professionalism. They look at the students as somebody who should be respected. Another neophyte teacher shared of his being not so confident on how to implement classroom management because his training and exposure was more on teaching high school students and not elementary pupils.

Significant Response 5. *“I graduated BSED major in Mathematics not BEED so I was really nervous, so it was really like a risk for me to face these kids, because I really don't know what to do.”*

This is understandable because the approach in managing kids entails different strategies when managing adults in class.

Assessing student performance is also challenging to neophyte teachers. The task of choosing the appropriate testing strategy is critical and important because its objective is to arrive and conclude about the real picture of the student learning. Vital to instruction is assessment for it affects the important decisions relative to grading system, placement, instructional, and curriculum needs, advancement, funding requirements and the most important is to assess if the goals of education were met or not (George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2008).

Significant Response 1. *“Translating the grades their score into ratings and then I noticed if it is 4.0 based it was too much, it's very easy for 4.0 base line because I was a college student here, my teacher would always emphasize that it is 5.0 base line. And so I will follow 5.0 base line because this is my background 5.0 base line. But then I asked colleagues. Their baseline is 40.”*

Significant Response 2. *“Sometimes I'm asking myself if my test items are correct, so I will be asking Sir Lus, this is your expertise, please help me with this.”*

It was revealed in the study that neophyte teachers have no significant involvement in research activities of the university. Although research is one of the four pronged functions of a teacher in a tertiary level, they cannot perform such task because of their lack of knowledge and experience. Neophyte teachers should be guided on this aspect by faculty members who have been exposed to research works. The study further discloses that the neophyte teachers have very high enthusiasm and are very much willing to engage in research.

Significant Response 1. *“This University is like asking – I mean requiring teachers to perform research tasks. But then again as a beginner that really is my frustration because in my college years we were not able to finish our paper. I really don't have that much, I was not able to establish research in me and so I have a lot of research topics that I would like to start but then again I am not sure who the person to talk with. Sometimes I would ask, sir what's my first move, I want to write this, but then I don't know what to do.”*

Theme 6. Cues for establishing relationships with internal and external stakeholders

“Learning is no longer restricted to what goes on within the school walls, it is now universally accepted in many countries that schools must relate well to their surrounding communities if they are to be effective” OECD, (2001, p. 42). A successful teaching career does not only require excellent technical knowledge and skills; teaching also requires social skills. Teachers are expected to deal with different stakeholders inside and outside the classroom. Internally, it is a mandate that teachers should have good relationship with colleagues, peers, superiors, and students; while external stakeholders such as the parents must also be dealt properly.

Significant Response 1. *“I really need to establish my relationship because I am new. So really my goal was to be friend with everyone. And to avoid those situations but then I was not able to avoid because I was not aware with the rules. But honestly in my heart I never mean that...”*

Significant Response 2. *“In the beginning ma’am, there is reservation most especially that they were my teachers before and my respect is beyond and so sometimes it is very difficult to have this transition from being their student before and being the colleague now.”*

Significant Response 3. *“We work as a family. People there are very nice. Every time there’s like fun, we laugh, and people there are funny. And they take things very light, we share jokes and we take things lightly.”*

Significant Response 4. *“It’s part of teaching in a way because you need do not only with pupils, but you need to deal with parents.”*

The result of the inquiry shows that neophyte teachers recognize the importance of establishing a good rapport with the different stakeholders. They value this relationship in pushing forward their teaching career in the university. They need to establish that most ideal relationship with peers little by little, that is why they were very careful about their actions and words. In times of misunderstanding between teachers and parents, the students are caught in the middle and sometimes their opportunity to advance is lost (Schwartz, 2016). The neophyte teachers assigned to the Integrated Laboratory School (ILS) of LNU have experienced “light bullying” and pressure from some parents. It is therefore important for neophyte teachers to acquire skills on how to effectively deal with problematic parents.

Theme 7. Cues for the choice of mentors

The mentor is the one who dictates the direction and flow of the mentorship. His or her idea should be considered first and foremost in a mentoring program. According to Barlin (2010), the extent that the program would be able to support new teachers in helping the kids to become successful is being determined by the mentor’s effectiveness. It is acknowledged that successful mentors are good educators and track record that highlights of what the student should learn.

Significant Response 1. *“Sir La, Sir Bri they were there to assist me. And then Sir Q as the teacher for that subject. They were there.”*

Significant Response 2. *Sir Ju has been my secret mentor. So, he will be telling me this and then like interviewing. How was your day? What are your problems?*

Significant Response 3. *“A person who will visit my class and then tell me your problem is this. Because what we did with ma’am JP is that we strategize our own because we really need to improve ourselves”*

The success of a mentoring program depends on the willingness of the mentor. The neophyte teachers in this study consider as mentors those who did not have the formal authority to evaluate them—peers and colleagues; not the case with their superiors. According to the participants, a peer is more readily available to assist them; for instance, asking what happened during the day and showing interest in the problems encountered by the neophyte teacher. In addition, it is easier for the neophyte teachers to synchronize their schedule with that of their peers.

Conclusion

The experiences of the neophyte teachers in the early stage of their respective teaching career is problematic and challenging, brought about by their lack of expertise on teaching practice, knowledge about the learners and the culture and context of the University where they are teaching.

As stated in the coping strategies section, neophyte teachers asked direct assistance from colleagues and senior faculty members who readily provided the much-needed support and assistance. This implies that behind this coping mechanism of approaching colleagues and senior faculty, there is a desire to be mentored and to participate in a formal neophyte teacher mentoring program, until now, being lacking at LNU. It is from the participants’ actual struggles and problematic work settings that cues for a viable mentoring program are derived. Cues for establishing rapport and smooth interpersonal relationship with internal and external stakeholders in the context of a teaching-training university is likewise put forward. The mentoring program should focus on (a) academic and administrative policy orientation, (b) enhancement of neophyte teachers’ expertise along classroom management, (c) classroom discipline, (d) teaching strategies, (e) testing and assessment of students, and (f) research methods. Further studies are recommended in order to generate the details on the implementation of a teacher mentoring program relative to duration, practicality of schedule, choice and qualification of mentors, incentives, de-loading, and the like from the perspectives of the neophyte teachers themselves, their colleagues, and immediate supervisors in varied university context.

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