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Teach, Learn, Reflect: Narratives of SEA Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how South East Asian (SEA) pre-service teachers who were part of the SEA Teacher project engage in critical self-reflection to survive the demands of internship. Anchored on the theory of situated cognition which assumes that knowing is inseparable from doing and that knowledge is situated in activity bound to social, cultural and physical contexts, the researchers examined how their experiences hone them as professional teachers. Narrative inquiry guided the study which involved 6 pre-service teachers who were interviewed. Other sources of data include documents and interviews with teacher training instructors. Based on the narratives, the SEA teachers used self-reflection in every phase of their practice teaching experience. Themes that emerged include initiation, development and celebration. This study served as an avenue for interns to be heard and teacher education courses should integrate real classroom observation and immersion. Moreover, this study will serve as an eye opener for South East Asia Minister of Education Organization, the facilitator of the program and universities in South East Asia to focus on the real needs and pressing issues of the recipients of the project.

Keywords: SEA, Education, Narrative inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Internship is the total immersion of the prospective teacher where he or she experiences the process of planning actual teaching and evaluating learning. This is now the avenue for the interns to bridge theory and practice. The Mariano Marcos State University College of Teacher Education has the mission of providing technical and professional training specifically on producing manpower for the country and the world's educational system in the pre-elementary, elementary and secondary levels. The college continually aspires to produce holistic and committed teachers.

One avenue to hone pre-service teachers is the SEA Teacher Project which is a month-long program that aims to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers from universities in Southeast Asia to have teaching experiences or practicum. This enables them to develop their teaching skills, gain more confidence, increase social skills, and expose them to diverse teaching and learning situations and opportunities.

In October 2014, SEAMEO Council has adopted its education agenda or the seven priority areas for SEAMEO to work together to improve quality education in the ASEAN countries. One of its priority areas in achieving quality education in the region is "Revitalizing Teacher Education". Now on its fifth year, the project has not been given ample monitoring and evaluation on its effectiveness. While there may have been some evaluations at the university levels as each recipient had to pass a form to this effect, not one has been analyzed and published elsewhere.

Also, studies and literatures about the lived experiences of pre-service teachers are scarce. These bodies of literature only explored the evaluation/assessment of the teacher education program and the pre-service education program of the teacher training institutions but not with the challenges, hassles and coping mechanisms, pressures, apprehensions and experiences of the pre-service teachers.

In the light of the identified gaps in the literature, this study was conducted to recount the experiences, challenges, viewpoints of students through the narratives of their stories lived as South East Asian Teachers' Project (SEA Teacher Project). More specifically, it attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the activities and most unforgettable experiences of SEA Teachers in their internship?
 - a. Inbound
 - b. outbound

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2. What did they learn in these experiences? How did they perform in the project?
3. What were the challenges they faced and how were they able to hurdle them?

This present study is anchored on the situated learning theory of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. In this theory in relation to pre-service education, the student teacher's learning is situated, that is, as it normally occurs is embedded within an activity, context and culture. Knowledge needs to be presented in authentic contexts. In this case, the pre-service teachers learn well because of the authentic context where they are in which is the classroom. As interaction and collaboration are essential components of the situated learning, the pre-service teachers become involved in a community of practice which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired. As the novice teacher moves from the periphery of a learning community to its center, he or she becomes more active and engaged within the culture and eventually assumes the role of an expert.

RESEARCH METHOD

This part explains the design, methods and procedures in conducting this study. It also discusses the ethical considerations and reflexivity of the researchers.

Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world." In other words, people's lives consist of stories. Field notes, interviews, journals, letters, autobiographies, and orally told stories are all methods of narrative inquiry.

In this study, the principles and tenets of narrative inquiry were employed as the narratives of the pre-service teachers of their stories about their Practice Teaching stints as indicated in the SEA Teacher Project. Narrative inquiry assumes that individuals and in this study, the Practice Teachers construct reality by sharing stories and critical incidents in their lives that led to the life's turning points. In this study, the individual narratives attempts to show a sequence of action (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysts tend to know and why events happened the way they did. Narratives embedded from field notes, interviews, observations, journals and orally told stories were excellent pathways to crystallize the feelings, hopes, thoughts, concepts, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of the four pre-service teachers who participated in this study.

This study was conducted in the Mariano Marcos State University College of Teacher Education, Laoag City to those who were recipients of the SEA Teacher Project both inbound and outbound. The College offers Bachelor in Secondary Education and Bachelor in Elementary Education and one of the courses students take before they graduate is Education 200 or Practice Teaching. They have two phases for the Practice Teaching. One is the on-campus teaching where they conduct their pre-service teaching at the Laboratory High Schools of Batac and Laoag and the off-campus teaching where the Practice Teachers conduct their practice teaching in any school of their choice outside the university and now in its second year, for those who qualified to have their internship abroad, chose to go to any university which is a part of the SEAMEO SEA Teacher Project.

As to the first part of this study where documents were obtained from their portfolio, all of the inbound and outbound participants were covered. Documents that were passed to the Commission on Higher Education were also considered. In gathering the lived experiences of the clientele, there were four participants in this study from outbound and inbound. They were chosen via purposive sampling with the following selection criteria: (1) must be a BSE/BEED Practice Teacher, (2) must have on-campus and off-campus internship (3) diverse majors (specialization) (4) willing to share their experiences.

The study was conducted from January to May 2019. The research involved multiple sources of data. The data obtained and analyzed for this study were based on interview transcripts, observation notes, teaching portfolio and blogs of the participants, and reports submitted to the universities. The interviews allowed the participants to express meaning about their viewpoints and opinions on teaching internships (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Two in-depth interviews were conducted for each participant. A uniform interview guide was used for the four participants (2 inbound and 2 outbound) which were conducted through phones for the inbound. After building rapport and gaining trust and confidence, they provided documents and pictures related

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to the study. Likewise, they (inbound) allowed the researchers to observe them unobtrusively while they conducted some activities outside of the classrooms like conducting outdoor activities during the University Foundation, presentation practices, and talent development activities.

From the interviews, documents, and observations, a narrative for each participant was written to highlight their viewpoints, feelings and sentiments, moral dispositions, hopes, challenges, concepts, aesthetic reactions about Practice Teaching. Several alterations and revisions were vital in the study. Member checking was also employed at the end of the data collection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative analysis aims to identify the kinds of stories told about the researched phenomenon and the kinds of story representing the phenomenon in culture and society. Inductive analysis was also used.

Activities Done by the Sea Teacher Participants

The activities that were undertaken by the interns were classroom observation, teaching assistantship, teaching practice, preparation of instructional materials and appreciation of the country's culture through study visits

Inbound Students and their Schools:

The Mariano Marcos State University received 16 exchange students from eight universities in Indonesia. These universities are the following: 1) Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka (UHAMKA); 2) Pakuan University (UNPAK); 3) Sebelas Maret University (UNS); 4) Ganesha University of Education (UNDIKSHA); 5) Lambung Mangkurat University (ULM); 6) University of Bengkulu (UNIB); 7) Universitas Jambi (UNJA); and 8) Indonesia University of Education (UPI).

Outbound Students and their Host Schools

Last August 2018, the university sent five (5) students in the Sea Teacher Project, Batch 6. In 2019, however, 20 students from the College of Teacher Education joined the project. Of the 20, seven (7) were from the Bachelor of Elementary Education while 13 were from the Bachelor of Secondary Education. Moreover, 19 of the 20 went to various Indonesian universities: 1) PGRI Madiun University; 2) Ganesha University of Education; 3) University of PGRI Semarang; 4) Pattimura University; 5) Indonesia University of Education; 6) University of Bengkulu; 7) State University of Makassar; and 8) University of Muhammadiyah Prof Dr Hamka. Meanwhile one (1) went to a university in Thailand, the Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University.

Inbound Students' Blog Addresses

One of the major requirements of the SEA Teacher Project is the participants' creation of a blog. It is required that the blogs have the following parts: 1) the general information and academic administration of the school; 2) pedagogical contents that includes teaching methods, learning materials and innovation, sources of learning and technology, and authentic assessment; 3) observation on teachers that includes the following parts (their planning for teaching, their preparing lessons and materials, their teaching in class, their measurement and evaluation, and the students' overall impression to the teacher performances); 4) the teaching plan (curriculum related to the major and teaching plan related to the major); 5) teaching practice (procedures of your teaching, time management and organizing activities, problem – solving, classroom management, and the students' overall impression in teaching); and 6) summary and recommendations on the purposes, procedures, outcomes, challenges and overall impression of practicum, and suggestions for future improvement.

These blogs were evaluated by the SEAMEO Secretariat and their quality determines whether the students will be issued a certificate of completion or not. It is worthy to point out that all the students' blogs passed the criteria set by SEAMEO.

Performance of MMSU in Implementing the Project

In order to monitor the services of the schools that are participating in the project, SEAMEO required all inbound students to evaluate the services of said schools. From the scale of 1 – 4, 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest, the students were asked to rate the school in four components of performance: 1) meaningfulness of learning experiences; 2) sufficiency of support; 3) qualifications of mentors and other personnel support; and 4) cooperative relations.

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Table 1. Below shows the performance rating of MMSU as evaluated by the 16 inbound students from eight universities in Indonesia.

Components of Performance	Description of Component	Performance Indicators	Rating	Verbal Description
Meaningfulness of Learning Experiences	The Programme of Activities include relevant and meaningful activities, and were conducted as scheduled.	Practicum activities in the programme are meaningful and relevant to teacher development.	3.51	Excellent
		Cultural activities are enriching and promote understanding of diversity.		
		Activities in the programme are conducted as scheduled.		
Sufficiency of Support	SEA Teacher Participants were provided standard accommodations and transportation service from and to the nearest airport.	Accommodations provided are at least within student standards.	3.8	Excellent
		Shuttle service from and to airport was provided.		
		Other support provisions were available (e.g., medical assistance, immigration assistance, food preparation facilities)		
Qualification of Mentors and Other Personnel Support	Mentors and other personnel support were qualified and proportionate to number of SEA Teacher participants, and provided appropriate assistance, especially when needed.	Mentors and other personnel support were available to provide guidance and assistance to the participants.	3.8	Excellent
		Mentors and other personnel who were assigned are highly qualified.		
		Assistance provided was truly helpful to address issues and concerns, and timely.		
Cooperative Relations	Actions of Partner University established rapport and promoted ASEAN harmonization and cooperation	Partner University responded/acted to issues and concerns promptly.	3.37	Excellent
		Partner University was actively engaged with Sending University in online meetings, interview sessions and other related activities.		
		Partner University took an initiative to advance ASEAN harmonization and cooperation (e.g., proposed next possible actions/agreements)		
Total			3.62	Excellent

Legend:

1.00 – 1.74
 2.50 – 3.24

less satisfactory
 highly satisfactory

1.75 – 2.49
 3.25 – 4.00

satisfactory
 excellent

As shown in the Table, all the four components of performance set by SEAMEO were all rated excellent by the inbound students; hence, the *excellent* rating for the Mariano Marcos State University as a receiving university of the SEA Teacher Project.

However, one university commented that the teaching experience of the students was only “minimum”. This reason maybe attributed to the time when the students had their practicum. The foundation anniversary of the university is January; hence, a lot of university-wide activities were conducted.

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However, based on the said comment, MMSU, still, was able to meet the minimum teaching experience requirement set by SEAMEO.

Performance of MMSU Students in the Project

Aside from the evaluation of the school as a receiving university, the outbound students were also rated by their cooperating teachers based on the rubric prescribed by SEAMEO. Said evaluation rubric has the following criteria: teaching performance, strategies and skills for effective instruction, and personal characteristics.

Table 2. the overall rating of the students

	Criteria	X	Verbal Description
Teaching Performance			
1	Knowledge of subject matter	3.7	Excellent
2	Focus on objectives of the lesson	3.6	Excellent
3	Knowledge on how students learn	3.6	Excellent
4	Assessment of the lesson	3.5	Excellent
	Weighted Mean	3.62	Excellent
Strategies and Skills for Effective Instruction			
1	Instructional Strategies	3.6	Excellent
2	Communicative	3.8	Excellent
3	Classroom management	3.4	Excellent
4	Overcome discipline problems	3.6	Excellent
	Weighted Mean	3.61	Excellent
Personal Characteristics			
1	Demonstrates resourcefulness.	3.7	Excellent
2	Show initiative during exchange period	3.8	Excellent
3	Demonstrate thoughtfulness of judgements	3.6	Excellent
4	Work with enthusiasm and a positive outlook	3.8	excellent
5	Demonstrate patience	3.9	Excellent
6	Demonstrate good manners, discipline, and respect	3.8	Excellent
7	Develop good relations with students, peers, teachers, and administrators	3.8	
8	Show professionalism in all areas	3.6	Excellent
	Weighted Mean	3.75	Excellent
	Grand Mean	3.66	Excellent

Legend:

1.00 – 1.74	less satisfactory	1.75 – 2.49	satisfactory
2.50 – 3.24	highly satisfactory	3.25 – 4.00	excellent

As shown in the Table, all the three components of performance set by SEAMEO were all rated excellent by the cooperating teachers of the outbound students; hence, the *excellent* rating of the students of the Mariano Marcos State University.

Strategies and Skills for Effective Instruction

Overall, from the data gathered spell the university's readiness to host international students and the MMSU students' preparedness to join international activities such as internships abroad. Moreover, the students' reflections in their blogs prove that the SEA Teacher Project, Batch 7, was able to meet its objectives.

Furthermore, the lived experiences of the students who were interviewed supported the claim above.

Narrative 1: Of Challenges, Realizations and Lessons: The Story of Jenina (19 years old)

There were challenges that the first client experienced like budgeting time; hectic schedules, lesson planning (objectives, writing, passing on time) and running out of strategies to employ. Side by side with these challenges were realizations that she needed to prioritize her activities and the best avenue to apply theories learned was in the real classroom set up. She also realized that she needed to socialize and reflecting is needed all the time after doing a teaching job.

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Some of the lessons that she learned were prioritizing, strategizing, appreciating the beauty of being beset with a lot of challenges inside and outside the classroom.

Narrative 2: On Problems, Strategies, and Outcomes: The Story of Coco (20 years old)

The second intern encountered several problems – lesson planning (formulating objectives), so many overlapping activities, handling variety of students, rigorous work and requirements.

In facing these problems he employed strategies like being more serious in work, exhibiting more maturity in thoughts and actions and he learned to document everything, he looked for the best strategy to teach the subject matter and did more reflecting.

As such, he became more responsible, garnered more rewarding experiences, and for him learning became fun aside from having learned the value of respect, and eventually realized that teaching is fun.

Narrative 3 – Formula to Success: Hurdles + Techniques + Values: The Story of Allena (19 years old)

Intern number 3 hurdled a lot of challenges in her internship such as; lesson planning due to time constraints, classroom management (teen-agers are very aggressive), classroom size in the field, making assessments and checking them, voluminous work in the field.

To address these she employed a number of techniques –listening, teaching with confidence, being prepared all the time, being more patient, documenting everything in class, reading/researching a lot, speaking louder, relaxing when necessary

Values and important lessons that she learned were respect, prioritizing, patience, and being initiative at all times.

Narrative 4: World of Practice Teaching: Braving the Odds, Responding to the Challenge, Realizing the Outcomes: The Story of Jamie (20 years old)

Odds of internship were experienced by clientele 4 such as being hard up to keep with the pacing and schedules, lesson planning occupied much of his time, had voluminous IMs to be prepared and these expensive, and his schedules were so hectic most of the time so he had never had a decent leisure.

He responded to the challenge through learning how to budget time and money, more creative, learning how to use indigenous materials, prioritizing, no postponing of work, patient, record keeping and reflecting.

After all these, he realized the outcomes - teaching is a noble profession, value of patience, internship is not a baptism of fire but a time of realization whether teaching is for him or not.

Emerging Themes

Initiation- As revealed by Allena, Coco, Jamie and Jenina, Practice Teaching is a challenging part of life for pre-service teachers. As part of the educative process, they put into practice the theories learned in the classroom. They plan and prepare in considerable more detail than the teacher with more experience. (Cicek, 2013). These pre-service teachers were faced with many problems like: lesson planning, classroom management, dealing with people, assessments, time management, IM conceptualization and production.

Development. The four PTs revealed that their internship paved the way for them to learn and become a better teacher. They have metamorphosed as they learned to prioritize, value time, write good plans, strategize, manage their class, deal with people, prepare IMs, respect others, be patient and open-minded. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Situated Cognition which states that context is an inherent part of learning.

Celebration. Resolutions as to the perceived challenges are very evident in the four cases. Admittedly, all of them are happy of going through their own ordeals in teaching. The all claimed they were successful in their internship stints. This is a proof that internship is an avenue for them to hone their craft.

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CONCLUSIONS

Internship is an integral part of the teacher education curriculum. It is the culmination of their 4-year course and having it in another country is a gratifying experience. The study provided rich information about the storied lives of interns as revealed in the narratives

Pre-service teachers use self-reflection in every phase of their practice teaching experience as evident in their storied lives. They take these experiences as avenues for learning. Pre-service teachers don't take their problems as negative vibes instead, they took it as ways to learn and prepare them to become better teachers someday.

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