

BELONGING, BEING AND BECOMING: LEARNING-TO-TEACH DURING INTERNSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Literature has identified varied internship models yet preparing early childhood pre-service teachers (ECPSTs) to confront the realities and challenges of learning-to-teach during internship remain scarcely examined. The qualitative single-case study sought to uncover ways to optimize ECPSTs' latent knowledge and skills given a limited time for internship. Findings revealed that the three ECPSTs learned to draw upon insights by reflecting on their daily teaching and learning experiences, relying on their own personal characteristics, forming a conference group among themselves and action-taking to address problems of practice during their internship. The processes of belonging, being and becoming implicate the re-imagination of internship programs to consider learning-to-teach as iterative, unpredictable and unstructured process.

Keywords: learning-to-teach, internship, early childhood pre-service teachers

INTRODUCTION

Internship is a significant feature of a teacher education program where a student teacher is immersed in the rudiments of teaching set in the real teaching and learning environment. During internship early childhood pre-service teachers were deployed to partner schools where they experienced the whole process of teaching and learning under the supervision of cooperating teachers. It was expected of these pre-service teachers who had reached this stage to put into practice the pedagogical content knowledge they acquired from related courses prior to internship (Teacher Education Council, 2015). It is through this practice teaching component that EC pre-service teachers should be given all the opportunities to develop their full potential as they are mentored by their cooperating teachers. Internship is where practical teaching takes place that brings pre-service teachers into a programme of cooperative and interactive guidance by experienced teachers (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Chong, 2006).

The exploratory purpose of this study probed into the tacit learning-to-teach experiences (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) of EC pre-service teachers which often draw less attention due to the many concerns that need to be addressed in partner schools. Understanding EC pre-service teacher learning through uncovering the spoken as well as the unspoken aspects of their internship experiences identified elements that yielded explanation

and rich description of their learning would then be used to improve teacher education practices.

Learning-to-teach as a hyphenated phenomenon (Silverman, 2014) draws attention from the researcher because, learning-to-teach in the context of teacher preparation has not been fully examined. The dynamics of learning-to-teach which encompass practical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, skill and predispositions are more inclined to surface during internship hence, the right timing for exploration to see its impact in nurturing EC pre-service teachers' life-long learning may be different in the context of teaching in disadvantaged communities. Thus, this study was underpinned by the questions: How do EC pre-service teachers learn to draw upon insights from teaching experiences and use them to address concrete problems of practice during their internship?

Literature Review

At the core of this study is the understanding of early childhood pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach during internship. Since the 1980's the research landscape has seen significant changes in the way initial teacher education has been viewed triggering inquiry on the key paradigms and practices that relate to understanding learning-to-teach phenomenon. Teacher education programs envision to imbibe in the teachers to think pedagogically, reason through dilemmas, investigate problems, develop appropriate curriculum for diverse group of learners as a product of their reflection with student learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) This scheme therefore challenges internship programs to teach what good teaching is – to reflect pre-service teacher's learning-to-teach. Caires et al. (2012) noted the gradual shift leaning to the process of learning-to-teach, which focuses on the way teachers think about what they do, their cognitive processes during teaching and the numerous factors that they have to deal with in their ongoing interaction in the classroom.

The Internship Program

Early childhood pre-service teachers' learning intensifies during the internship program, a component in teacher preparation within which they are deployed to partner schools for a defined period of time. They are assigned to cooperating teachers from whom they receive support and guidance. According to Machado and Meyer-Botnarescue (2005), cooperating teacher's style in guiding student teachers is placed on a degree of control continuum between directives (high structure) to collaborative (unstructured). This continuum has been implemented by the Department of Field Study and Student Teaching in the University (Student Teaching Handbook, 2015) for decades which needs review.

The pre-service teachers benefit from internship as part of their learning in the following ways: (a) exposure to an authentic environment that will make them acquire the competencies considered as outcomes of teacher preparation (Teacher Education Council, 2015); (b) provision for a setting where they receive collaborative and interactive mentoring by experienced teachers (Hudson, 2013); (c) a venue to learn to reflect on their actions and decisions in the classroom (Student Teaching Handbook, 2015); and (d) a foundation where pre-eservice teachers will have a clear conceptualization of themselves as teachers, develop their own philosophy and chart their professional growth (Titilayo, 2012). Despite the benefits enumerated above, the kind of university-school partnership lacks the envisioned

understanding and transparency (Ayob et al., 2014) that could have fostered equal partnership which respects the role of the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher. Ayob et al. (2014) further argues that a partnership practicum must be established where teachers in partner schools are not merely treated cooperating teachers.

Learning-to-Teach Patterns during Internship

Research on pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach conceptions, attitudinal aspects, cognitive and regulative strategies and aspects of emotion regulation are components that consistently shape the different patterns of pre-service teachers' learning (Donche et al., 2015). Corollary to this Stürmer and Seidel (2017) introduced the "concept of professional vision" to gauge features of pre-service teachers' knowledge pointing to the contextualized and situated nature of real-world demands of the teaching profession. Pre-service teachers' professional vision needs to be identified so that their theory-practice integrated learning (Stürmer & Seidel, 2017) can be supported during their internship. Analyzing pre-service teachers' theoretical awareness of learning, Brante et al. (2015) studied the variation theory of learning. Variation theory assumes that for one to claim to have learned something there must be recognition of new and more developed aspects of the object of learning. As applied to learning-to-teach, pre-service teachers are not only expected to transfer theories to practice but to develop ways to construct understanding of their own learning. Qualitative analysis of study identified three categories of student answers characterizing their theoretical understanding: emergent, premature and unaware (Brante et al., 2015). The use of this categorization was considered to identify which level of awareness the EC pre-service teachers have about their learning demonstrating how they relate their prior knowledge to learning-to-teach.

Oosterheert and Vermunt (2001) established a number of consistent relationships between different learning-to-teach components which have been identified as different 'patterns' of learning-to-teach. Teacher education degree programs has further revealed that the way in which students learn-to-teach can be examined in a multidimensional way by focusing not just on attitudinal aspects, but also on interrelated learning components such as learning-to-teach conceptions, cognitive and regulative strategies and aspects of emotion regulation.

Learning-to-teach patterns during internship is subject to a relatively degree of change- it largely depends on how student teachers are receptive to learning opportunities. Donche et al. (2015) identify four types of students based on how they acquired learning: (a) independent meaning oriented students are those who need the least supervision and can improve their teaching by enhancing their knowledge base, making use of available sources of information as required by their courses or sought elsewhere and relate this information on their own, (b) dependent meaning oriented students are those who do not see the importance of their own experience as a learning source and could not decide for themselves which aspects of their own teaching still require improvement making them distrustful of their own observation and relies on their trainers for awareness-development processes, (c) reproduction-oriented students are those who improve their teaching on the basis of their existing knowledge and are oriented towards the further development of this knowledge, (d) survival-oriented students believe that with constant practice of teaching, they will automatically end up learning the job, paying no attention to developing their own frame of reference. Of the four types, an independent meaning-oriented way of learning has to be

developed for learning-to-teach and is considered as the most essential in pursuing a career in teaching.

Challenges and Opportunities during Internship

The pressing problem of addressing the issue of equipping pre-service teachers with adequate competence to cope with the complexity of the classroom context can be attributed to the pre-service teachers' preparation. Three key elements have been identified that could induce the effectiveness of teacher education programs: (a) construction of an integrated body of knowledge about teaching, (b) the application of theories to practice, and (c) the development of a cognitive lens for analyzing teaching-learning processes (Eilam & Poyas, 2009) however, these remain to be a challenge which can be surmised from the consistently dismal performance of teacher graduates in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (Cristobal, 2020).

Having been trained in the university in the first three years of teacher preparation, EC pre-service teachers are expected to have acquired the pedagogical content knowledge and right set of skills to be applied in the internship. In the course of their training, EC pre-service teachers have developed beliefs over many years of schooling through classroom observation, called "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975). The term apprenticeship of observation sends a negative notion because it has been equated to claims that "teachers teach on the way they were taught" (Schön, 1987). Abundance of literature objects to this claim asserting that teacher candidate' prior experiences during their apprenticeship of observation can be utilized in productive ways (Feimen-Nemser, 2001; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). One of the ways to use EC pre-service teacher's internship experiences has been emphasized in recent studies that focus on pedagogical leadership. Kahila et al. (2020) point to opportunities for growth within the context of distributed leadership perspectives by focusing on early childhood education teachers' essential role in enhancing other actors' participation in leadership. EC pre-service teacher learning is enhanced if teacher educators provide opportunities to critically analyze the previous experiences and to guide pre-service teachers to newly craft their beliefs about teaching practices.

The conceptions of learning of both EC pre-service teachers and in-service teachers were further examined. Chi-hung et al. (2013) emphasized the participants' qualitative and quantitative conceptions of learning are integral to the understanding and application of what one has learned; giving least importance to memorizing and reproducing important facts. These conceptions of learning enable early childhood pre-service teachers to understand their own nature and abilities which leads to the more use of child-centered approach to teaching. Thus, EC pre-service teachers' internship has to be imbedded early in the existing early childhood education program.

Clearly, much of a pre-service teacher's understanding of knowledge-in-practice will be further developed during internship but for practice-based teacher education to be transformative, Vartuli et al. (2016) posit that teacher educators continue to indefinitely learn more about best practices to enhance pre-service teacher learning and development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The use of single-case case study research, blending the use of instrumental and exploratory strategies (Yin, 2014) enabled the researcher to conduct a systematic, critical inquiry generating understanding to contribute to cumulative knowledge about early childhood pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach experiences. The particularity and complexity of EC pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach qualified the use of single-case study that helped the researcher emphasize episodes of nuance, the sequence of events in context and the wholeness of the individuals (Stakes, 1995) who participated in this study.

Method of Data Collection

Given the emphasis for in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, data for qualitative research is drawn from purposefully selected, relatively small but "information-rich cases". The use of *discriminant sampling* (Creswell, 2017) was seen to be appropriate allowing the researcher in depth examination of the event three early childhood pre-service teachers assigned in a partner school situated in a disadvantaged environment were selected as ideal participants for the study. Their ability to communicate orally and in writing was deemed necessary for the researcher to obtain data from interviews, focus discussion and journal entries.

The researcher employed in-depth interviews, (Yin, 2014) focus group discussions (Silverman, 2014), structured and unstructured observations and document review (Creswell 2017) as means of generating rich data. The use of multiple sources of data from multiple data collection methods resulted to "thick description" (Yin, 2014) of the case. Thus, the importance of preserving the integrity of individual accounts and carrying out 'within-interview' analyses established validity.

Method of Analysis

Interviews and classroom observations were recorded and transcribed, and were analysed as documents. Journal entries, instructional materials and physical design of a learning event were treated as artifacts and used for content analysis. Prolonged engagement with the participants and the site enabled the collection of naturally occurring data. These were treated as field notes and were utilized for narrative analysis. Analysis commenced with getting familiar with data sets. Data were then carefully understood as answers to the research questions. Consequently, framework was developed to identify the broad ideas, concepts, behaviors or phrases and codes were assigned to them. This process was useful in giving structure and labelling the data. Finally, patterns and connections were identified. This process led to identification of data to surface reformulated meanings which were used to frame categories and themes.

Ethical Consideration

Having been granted approval from the institutional review board of the university, the researcher set to employ in-depth case study by meeting with the research participants prior to the conduct of the study in order to inform them of the purpose and nature of the study and how the results of observations and interviews may be used. To address researcher's subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the study, various procedural safeguards were taken, such as sample triangulation, data triangulation and data analysis triangulation. Communicative validation was sought where the results were fed back to the respondents who were sources of information, and were asked to agree or disagree with the result to ensure that the transcribed responses were interpreted correctly.

FINDINGS

The three EC pre-service teachers learned to draw upon insights by reflecting on their daily teaching and learning experiences, relying on their own personal characteristics, forming a conference group among themselves and acting on to address problems of practice during their internship. From the voluminous verbatim transcripts, significant statements were extracted. The participants repeatedly mention that internship brought relevant insights to them in terms of using appropriate strategies, preparation of instructional materials, management of class and children's behavior, evaluation of learning and dealing with everyday challenges in school such as school supplies needed by the pupils and issues concerning the parents of their pupils. It can be noted that EC pre-service teachers were concerned about the behavior of children that pose challenges in the way they managed the class. However, they turned these challenges into learning opportunities as they tried out different strategies to teach the topic and to manage pupils' behaviour.

EC pre-service teachers expressed their understanding of learning-to-teach in the following excerpts taken from interview transcripts and journal entries. The verbalizations and journal entries that follow illustrate the changes in their perspectives during their internship.

Reflection on Daily Teaching and Learning Experiences

Interns' journal entries and interview transcripts mirror their reflections of their everyday experiences. Reflective journals made them look back and take stock of how they develop overtime. It is where they wrote their "highs and lows" (Ces). It is in their journals where they intimated their "fears and failures and plans to do better" (Kai). It is in their journals where they "celebrate their little triumphs" (Aneth) and be motivated to be "better versions of themselves for their pupils" (Aneth). The researcher found that it was worth the time to read and analyze every entry which provided rich descriptions of their everyday lives as interns. Kai learned to teach by doing it every day, seeing to it that she had enough time to talk with children and her presence to be felt in class. She attributed her understanding of self by examining closely her journal entries, confronting her flaws and planning what better things to do to avoid committing the same mistakes. Kai had this to say:

"I learned to teach, maybe...really on my own. Like I was exposed to ...at first, I was culture shocked. So I had to study how to treat them, like, what should my strategies and techniques be so that I'd learn how to teach them. Although my cooperating teacher was of course, assisting me, but, it's still different

when I was teaching...I was learning to teach. I learn through the process of teaching them while talking to them, while being in the classroom. It's there where I learned more. I evaluate myself after I teach...after the class...I evaluate myself in terms of what happened today. Through journals... whenever I see my journals, oh, this is where my flaw is, so tomorrow this is what I'll do..." (Kai)

Relying on Personal Characteristics

Because of the challenges posed by teaching in a real setting, Aneth, Kai and Ces discovered their own strengths and managed to learn from their mistakes. The verbalizations of the three participants confirm that they understand the profession they have chosen to enter and internship played a big part in their training. Although they had on-campus student teaching, which they implied as an ideal setting, internship in partner schools gave them what Ces called "preview to reality". The three interns beaming with positivity defied what seemed to be an insurmountable task during their internship particularly in this school that cater to children from disadvantaged community.

Another salient point of EC pre-service teacher's learning-to-teach is the understanding of their own value and how they developed overtime making them discover the value of the teaching profession. As mentioned,

"In teaching, everything should be done with grace under pressure." (Kai).

Describing herself as creative, Ces looked for inspiration in the way her pupils reacted to the instructional materials she prepared for her class. She always thought of ways to put her skills to action and in the process discovering more opportunities to learn. Here are some extracts from her journal:

August 9, 2017

I only recently discovered that these materials can also be used for behavior management. The original idea for this material was to help students concretize Mathematics through the use of manipulatives. This time as a behavior management tool, each group was given a container and I just add plastic eggs or get back the eggs depending on their behavior. I noticed how much energy I saved by just using these eggs. Instead of getting angry or shouting at the child, I just deduct the eggs. It is human tendency to want for more, to be recognized as the best and it is evident in children. (Ces)

However, there was an incident where Ces admitted her limitations and feeling of helplessness. Ces expressed how an unfortunate event has brought tremendous insight in the way she perceived her cooperating teacher's weakness that turned to courage as they confront the problems of disadvantages. Here, Ces learned through her reflection in her journal entry.

August 18, 2017

Today I witnessed the heart of a teacher. My CT cried when a parent of one of our students came and confirmed that the child had to transfer to another school. After the fire, they had nothing left here and it would be troublesome

to have a young child and not be able to provide her needs. My CT left the room for some time to cry, partly questioning why this has to happen to a child. And their situation finally hit me. I think this is what I saw in the eyes of my CT: I will miss this student, I may cry because I will miss her but I have to be strong for the entire class for the entire year. No one will take this student's place in my heart but I have forty more students who need to learn. And just like the families whose homes were burned to ashes, I must rise and get back again. I didn't expect my CT to have this kind of a weakness but I confirmed how lucky I am to be under her supervision. (Ces)

Forming Conference Groups

Apparently, in the limited time given for post conferences, the three EC pre-service teachers turned to each other for support. Kai sought her fellow interns' suggestions when it comes to expressing their reactions to some events. She wrote in her journal,

"I told Ate Aneth about my sentiments. I was ranting to her about what I experienced today and she felt the same. We both talked about things and what we should do to handle such situations."

It can be noted that Kai called Aneth, "Ate" which meant that Kai considered Aneth her older sister whom she could unload her grievances and she felt safe in doing that. Kai mentioned in her journal that she did this every time she needed someone to talk with. Aneth, who is the oldest among the three participants, in this instance assumed the role of a mentor friend to Kai.

Aneth described this lunchtime conversation as way to learn how to adjust to each other's personality. She recalled,

"We come together during lunch with our packed lunch. There we don't only share ideas but we also share our "baon" (packed lunch). It's also the time for us to unwind." Aneth added, "Doing that everyday made us best friends although we have different personalities. We learned to adjust to each other's character." Ces remembered the time when they had to make costumes for their students. She said, "We get to do several things together at the same time. We learned not to count the hours, we enjoyed each other's company."

They made their lunch break the time to catch up and compare notes on how they progress. The three interns started to recognize the importance of having someone to talk with and found time amidst their busy schedule for these meetings. They regarded these meetings as "conference" where they drew insights from the experiences of each other and benefit them cognitively and emotionally.

Taking Action

EC pre-service teachers confronted problems in terms of taking action by teaching children from economically marginalized communities and how they reflected on them. Analyses of their journal entries yielded data that were not captured in interviews. At some point during

the internship, the interns questioned some practices but they chose not to verbalize their comments and questions but instead implement changes in the way they design their lessons and instructional materials. Excerpts from their journal entries illustrate the insights and show some instances that can be considered as evidences of their learning overtime.

Ces intimated in her journal entries how she struggled to make sense of her internship journey. Despite the self-doubt and difficulties she encountered she managed to take each day in stride. The “roller coaster ride”, as she described it is characterized by the unexpected turns of events which she made evident in the series reflections she wrote in her journal.

A deeper description of their learning-to-teach experiences by taking concrete actions were also offered and verbalized:

“I feel that I need to adjust- adjusting all the time to fulfil... fill-in the children’s need and the things that I need to do.” (Ces)

“For me, teaching is a masterpiece because it takes time to polish...like an artwork. With teaching, it also takes time for you to grow as a teacher. And I learn through actions because every day is a new learning experience. We build relationship with our CT... it’s more learning everyday then we talk about it informally. I learn from my students as well by learning new strategies...because it works with some kids and did not work for some. So I am learning that a different strategy should be used with different students.” (Kai)

“I view teaching as a commitment expressed in taking action.... At the end of the day that’s still what you need to do. You’re still the teacher who will open their snacks for them. You’ll prepare lesson plans for them. Yourself too, you’ll still aim for self-growth...because you value your profession...and during internship I saw myself as a- uhm- mud or pot... my CT is the potter. She is polishing (circles her hand as if mixing something) she’s polishing us. So every demo teaching, when we go to school, we’re like really being molded. There’s something changing in what I am as a student teacher. Because the more that I get molded (circles hand as if mixing something) by my CT, then I can see their needs, I can see what needs to be done. There...I felt that teaching became more meaningful.” (Aneth)

Learning-to-Teach as Iterative, Unpredictable and Unstructured Process

The researcher’s prolonged engagement with the research participants and the research site enabled her to gather thick and robust description of the EC pre-service teachers’ learning-to-teach during their internship in a disadvantaged environment vis-a-vis the kind of mentoring they experienced from persons who had a hand in shaping their learning. Three interesting themes emerged relative to the internship continuum in which EC pre-service teachers were immersed over a period of three months. Almost a month was spent for waiting to be deployed and the next two months were the intensive immersion in the partner school. Based from the journals, interviews and documents that were analyzed, the EC pre-service teachers underwent three phases of learning which were mentioned repeatedly during the interviews as Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Although it can be conveniently termed as three phases, it does not mean to say that the three phases are stages in an upward linear manner. The continuum is characterized as iterative, unpredictable and ruffled which can be attributed to Ces' description of her experience as "a roller coaster ride" and Kai's repeated mention of the statement, "I am shocked" even towards the end of their internship. Unlike Aneth, the most matured intern of the three took her journey in stride, never missing a point for learning despite difficult circumstances. Any of the three, Belonging, Being, Becoming, may come first second or last – it all depends on the maturity, openness and readiness of an EC pre-service teacher for his or her internship, not to mention their previous experiences with children especially with marginalized background. To sequence the phases of learning-to-teach in an orderly arrangement is a misunderstanding and an understatement of this complex process of pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach.

Belonging

'Belonging' is the phase where EC pre-service teachers are oriented on the process of learning-to-teach. This is when they tried 'to learn the ropes' and 'test the waters' to fit in the new environment. The long wait for their deployment was used to be acquainted with the policies set by the Institute for Teaching and Learning and the requirements for Admission to Practice Teaching had to be complied. The endorsement letter signalled the Belonging Phase where the interns ready to be deployed to partner schools. 'Belonging' phase is more than getting to know the principal, teachers and other personnel in the partner school, the interns needed to understand the culture, climate and the norms pervasive in the new setting. Nevertheless, the interns felt that they are welcome and they are willing to adjust to the new environment.

This feeling of *belonging* was what Ces wrote in her journal "the preview to reality" as she tried to grasp her purpose in this seemingly new phase of her preparation. Unfortunately, the sense of Belonging may not be felt when an intern is prevented to take part in the lesson and was just cautioned to sit and observe, which Kai experienced on the first and second day. Kai felt she 'belong' after her cooperating teacher trusted her with the children. For Ces and Aneth, 'belonging' entailed challenge as to how they could enter the world of their pupils.

Being

A sense of 'being', a state of having existence, gradually develops as the three interns saw their place in the classroom in particular and in the school in general. Aneth remembered when after two weeks, she heard her cooperating teacher introduced her to a parent by saying;
"Siya si Teacher Aneth, teacher siya dito, katulad ko. [She is Teacher Aneth, she's also a teacher like me]."

She felt a sense of pride having been introduced as a teacher. As for Kai, she felt the sense of "being" when she got used to the routine and her pupils started to follow her sans her shouting. Ces knew that she reached this 'being' phase when her cooperating teacher stopped questioning her about the 'new' things she introduced to class. She felt some space and freedom to make decisions for the class. The 'being' phase does not flow smoothly. There

were times when the interns were jolted to some realities they had to face like that day when the community was burned to ashes. That incident was something they did not anticipate which caused them to a lot of adjustment. Ces learned to see the deeper side of her cooperating teacher when she saw her CT cried knowing that they would have one pupil less. She went back to 'belonging' as she saw herself in her CT. Despite the challenges the incident brought they saw how teachers normalize the situation by continuing the activities and the lessons set for the coming weeks that they too would have to go back to 'belonging' as they moved on.

Becoming

The 'becoming' phase was marked with confidence and optimism in the profession. Aware of the challenges they were put through, the interns thought that they were on the road to become professional teachers. It can be noted from their philosophy of teaching, as one of the entries in their portfolio, that they have already formed their beliefs not based on practice alone, but accompanied by principles and theories which they explained in their write up. Each completed anecdotal reports of a pupil that they helped to read, although at first it was just a requirement but later on they learned to see that they could be enablers too. That experience brought a sense of 'becoming', as Aneth pointed out,

"Feeling ko po ang kulang na lang ay lisensiya (I feel that I'm short of getting my license)".

In fact, during the first two weeks of Internship in the partner school, Aneth has exhibited knowledge and skills becoming of a teacher. The next weeks were just polishing the latent skills that were waiting to shine.

Given these instances however, reaching 'becoming' phase is never bereft of rough spots. Kai was confidently ready for her final demonstration teaching a day before that grand demonstration day when she found out that the materials she prepared days before and her laptop was stolen in their house. Despite the suggestion by her cooperating teacher to postpone her demonstration teaching, she decided to go on with it as scheduled. Kai's cooperating teacher was proud of her seeing that she performed well despite the problem. But reading Kai's reflection of her demonstration teaching proved that she is capable of evaluating herself and learning from that experience.

Reaching that point of 'becoming' made the EC pre-service teachers see what they could do for children affected by disadvantages. They thought of advocacies they would want to be associated with. Ces, for example started intensifying a project on Global Citizenship being an officer of the UNESCO Club in the university. Kai has been active in the activities of the church, while Aneth started her own organization called 'Duyan' (Cradle), a group of EC pre-service teachers who will help orphaned Marawi children in the partner school

DISCUSSION

Using the lens of qualitative single-case case study research, the study yielded lessons learned (Yin, 2014) from the in-depth study of the three major participants. The findings drawn from a small sample but purposively selected research participants were instrumental (Stakes,

1995) in understanding learning-to-teach in the context of disadvantaged environment. It is interesting to note that the findings this study proved to cause a paradigm shift in the way EC pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach is viewed. It is noteworthy to know that by and large, the study points to the development of a mentoring model that needs to be informed mainly by experiences of the EC pre-service teachers and their cooperating teachers in actual settings. Likewise, the information obtained from the principal and the university supervisor illuminate the phenomenon under study.

As shown in the study, learning-to-teach amidst adversities stretched EC pre-service teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge through meaningful engagement with children. The learning-to-teach experiences as demonstrated by the research participants prompted rethinking how internship can be maximized. The dynamic and continuous process (Caires et al., 2012) of initiating the early childhood pre-service teachers into the educational community during internship may no longer fit to the model being used in the universities as seen in student teaching handbook (Student Teaching Handbook, 2015). Reconsidering the early childhood internship practices has been recommended by Mohd Sharif et al. (2020) in which it emphasizes the need for childcare practitioners to undergo certification process. In that way, certified and experienced childcare practitioners will be more adept in mentoring early childhood pre-service teachers. Training EC pre-service teachers during internship is more than following a predictable pattern of experiences if their individual differences have to be considered.

Donche et al. (2015) identified four types of students based on how they acquired learning which had been useful in analyzing EC pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach experiences. The learning stages are indicative of where and how they understand a particular context and not on particular points during internship viewed as a progressively occurring continuum. For example, although the interns know and understand the Kindergarten curriculum, they realized that an unfamiliar strategy was implemented in response to the needs of the children in the partner school. The strategy which they called explicit teaching ran counter to the principles of developmentally appropriate learning activities so they resorted to observing their cooperating teacher and asked questions about it.

Realizing that the cooperating teacher could hardly have the time to discuss explicit teaching to them, they acted on it because this unfamiliar strategy piqued them. So, they used all possible means to understand it and they even had discussion about it over lunch which they consciously reflect on it. Having understood the concept and the principle behind explicit teaching, they were confident to use it in class. However, it did not stop there because whenever they encountered something that created confusion and doubt, they adopted any of these moves to learn or re-learn something new. In this situation in which they have found confidence to use the strategy, they were already self-directed. The situations entailed EC pre-service teachers to adopt behaviors for them to assume the reaction and the responsibility they were called on.

Similar to the findings of Ellis et al. (2016) that the transformative effect of direct experience is dependent on the social composition of the placement school, these EC pre-service teachers' learning experiences have not been adequately examined in many studies, and teacher educators especially the ones supervising pre-service teachers have not optimized the capability of the interns to be independent meaning-oriented learners (Donche et al, 2015). This will remain to be problem if the usual training permeates in the way EC pre-service teachers are trained. In the time of changing policies, standards and programming in

the early childhood education, this study sought to contribute in the area of educating the EC pre-service teachers in terms of capitalizing on their ability to be self-aware in contextualizing their actions and decisions which is needed in teaching vulnerable children.

Undeniably, the early childhood pre-service teachers as participants in the study were seen to have exhibited growth during internship even in a given limited time. They have characterized their internship experiences as to having ‘highs and lows’, ‘smooth and rough rides’, never static but a dynamic one, at times transparent and at sometimes opaque. In the internship timeline, milestones have been defined as belonging, being and becoming not as stages but points in the continuum. The development of the EC pre-service teachers could not be ascertained at any fixed point which is different from the model of Furlong and Maynard (1995) in which the five stages of pre-service teacher’s development was identified. The model showing a ladder-like growth of an intern during internship is being implemented by the university where the EC pre-service teachers came from and frames the way interns were prepared by their mentors (Practice Teaching handbook, 2017).

The unpredictability and iterative process of learning-to-teach is evidenced by the many intervening factors caused by the difficult circumstances they faced. Despite the occurrences of challenging situations, the participants brought with them the insights of teaching vulnerable children. As shown in the study, the professional vision of early childhood pre-service teachers flourished. These findings are parallel to the findings of Grudnoff et al. (2013) that student teachers perceived their internship in disadvantaged communities did prepare them to teach in such context. Additionally, EC pre-service teachers’ exposure to multicultural classes – a diverse mix of Christian and Muslim children has trained them to understand inclusivity in diversity. This finding clearly illustrates the need to include multicultural education in the early childhood curriculum and training curriculum of in-service trainings of teachers as implied in the study of M. Abdullah and A. Abdullah (2018).

The content analyses of interviews, observations, documents and artifacts gave fresh insights on EC pre-service teachers’ learning-to-teach during internship. The promising visage of seeing the understandings and perceptions of EC pre-service teachers’ learning-to-teach and the processes in which they drew their learning in relation to the processes they were mentored cast an inspiration for the researcher to look at the problems that beset internship. Understanding of the intern’s beliefs and learning-to-teach experiences, finding out what may constraint their learning and how mentors will be able to adjust and influence their interns’ development.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that all the three participants learned to draw upon insights by reflecting on their daily teaching and learning experiences, relying on their own personal attribution, forming reflective conversations among themselves and action-taking to address problems of practice during their internship. A conclusion that is drawn from this finding is, EC Pre-service teachers learned to reflect on their learning-to-teach experiences through the various activities they had in the partner schools during internship. Thus, the interns’ immersion in a school that serves children from disadvantaged communities transformed them to become resourceful, creative and agentive. Further, the different behaviours EC pre-service teachers demonstrated are learning strategies that made them resilient and responsive

to different challenges they encountered during internship. Belonging, Being and Becoming are learning points in the internship continuum which can be iterative, unstructured and unpredictable. It is therefore paramount for cooperating teachers and university supervisors to have a “trained eye” to determine the learning-to-teach points of EC pre-service teachers at any given time. Having too much expectation will not help EC pre-service teachers to develop their potentials.

The opportunity afforded the researcher to witness EC pre-service teachers’ learning-to-teach experiences in the light of internship program being implemented in the university led to the appreciation of the relevance of partner schools in relation to educating the head, hand and hearts the future teacher professionals. Ongoing evaluation of the internship program needs to be directed at finding out on a timely basis any problems or issues that may stand in the way of pre-service teachers’ learning-to-teach. Formative assessment of ECPSTs’ performance through the cooperation of cooperating teachers and university supervisor contribute to their development. It is also recommended that an internship pre and post assessment of the interns be conducted to better prepare them and manage their expectations.

The lack of time has been identified as a major problem to optimize learning-to-teach experiences; it is recommended that internship be extended to two terms (six months) in partner schools to ensure the development of the EC pre-service teacher in terms of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, attitudes and other relevant skills. During the course of internship, the university should have activities that are designed for interns to relate to and be able to use in the field especially in addressing adversities during their practicum. Impliedly, an authentic university-school partnership program needs to be developed pushing for equal and complimentary roles of both partners for EC pre-service teachers to learn-to-teach effectively.

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