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## Getting Ready to Teach: a program outcome evaluation from reflections of practice teachers

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**Abstract:** Practice teaching in Teacher Education is a critical component in the preparation of teachers to teach effectively. Thus, institutions try to figure out how best they can prepare pre-service teacher education students to face the realities and challenges of teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this qualitative study, perceptions of sixty (N=60) undergraduate teacher candidates of Early Childhood Education from a Catholic University in the Philippines were explored. They completed at least 300 hours of practicum which included teaching in an authentic school setting, participating in community outreach activities, attending conferences, conduct of action research in their practicum site, and construction of a practicum portfolio. Data were gathered across three academic terms through reflective essays based on the following open-ended questions: (1) *What does it take to be a teacher today?* (2) *What do you believe are the things you learned in school that are most useful in the field?* (3) *What changes can you suggest to improve the program?*

Core themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis were dispositional traits, knowledge, and teaching skills. Underlying themes, such as having the passion to teach, being flexible and adaptable to the needs of diverse learners, being a good role model, critical and creative thinking and innovativeness in one's craft of teaching, staying up-to-date with local and global trends, using technology in the classroom, undertaking research, as well as being open to continuous learning were perceived to be very important in the current teaching profession. They also believed that they should be strong in content knowledge and pedagogy, and that learning experientially in an authentic learning environment is essential in learning to teach. They enumerated many courses they took in class that were useful in their practicum, as well as other experiences like conferences and community outreach. Longer period of practicum was suggested by majority of the respondents. Implications to pre-service teacher education are discussed.

**Key Words:** 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, EGAS, NCBTS, OBE, practicum



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in a country's development. It is also important to note that quality education is linked to quality of teachers. As what Dumlao-Valisno (2012) asserted, "Without quality of teachers, there can be no quality education." (p.187). Teacher education is therefore of high concern. Although there are timeless theories that support teaching practice, it is relevant to note that 21<sup>st</sup> century is driven by constant change, which is in part triggered by the rapid pace of new knowledge generation and technological innovations. Furthermore, diversity is observed to pervade in communities, schools and workplaces. Curricular reforms have been undertaken in Philippine teacher education programs in order for the Teacher Education programs to be more responsive to the "evolving needs of the society" (Dumlao-Valisno, 2012, p, 204). The Philippine government has, in fact, initiated some education reforms. One such reform is the K to 12 education system that was signed into law with the passage of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10533). The Enhanced K + 12 Basic Education has features that include among others: (1) mandatory kindergarten (2) spiral progression approach (3) mother tongue, (4) Senior high school (5) 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (6) learner-centered and research-based (7) standard and competence-based, seamless, decongested, (8) inclusive, culture-sensitive, integrative, contextualized, relevant and responsive, and (9) flexible, ICT-based and global. ([www.gov.ph/k-12](http://www.gov.ph/k-12)). Another educational reform is the CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) 46 series 2012. It was released by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) mandating all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to implement an outcomes-based education (OBE) curriculum design for all undergraduate and graduate courses. ([www.ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Handbook%20ob%20Typology%20Outcomes.pdf](http://www.ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Handbook%20ob%20Typology%20Outcomes.pdf)).

The aforementioned education reforms initiated the researchers to pose this question: How has the university's pre-service teacher education program prepared the teacher candidates to teach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Evaluation of program outcomes helps educators and educational leaders in finding out whether the established University's program

outcomes have been achieved. One starts looking at the graduate attributes established by the Institution, as well as the standards, such as the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS), and the 21<sup>st</sup> century standards based on Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Framework, and the Outcomes- Based Education framework. The National Competency-Based Standards "is an integrated theoretical framework that defines the different dimensions of effective teaching and is based on the core values of Filipino teachers on effective teaching and learning in seven domains" (Teacher Education Council, Department of Education, and Commission on Higher Education, 2007). In Spady's Outcome-Based Education framework, it identified role performance outcomes that are essential for students to possess and exhibit. These significant performance roles parallel with those roles that are needed in the workplace. (Spady & Uy, 2014). The course outcomes in the University's academic programs are derived from the four expected graduate attributes (EGAs) that are relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context. Notably, these expected graduate attributes are somehow aligned with the NCBTS, OBE's Performance Life Roles, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Below presents the framework that guided the research:

### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS:

- Listener & communicator (OBE's Performance Life Roles)
- Information, media & technology (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Learning & innovation skills (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)

### REFLECTIVE LIFE-LONG LEARNERS:

- Personal growth & professional development (" Reflects on the extent of the attainment of learning goals") (NCBTS Domain 7)
- Life & career skills (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Teachers & mentors (OBE's Performance Life Roles)

### CRITICAL & CREATIVE THINKERS:

- Learners & thinkers (OBE's Performance Life Roles)
- Planners and designers (OBE's Performance Life Roles)
- Learners and thinkers (OBE's Performance Life Roles)



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- Problem finders & solvers (OBE's Performance Life Roles)
- Literacies (financial, economic, entrepreneurial, civic, health, environment) (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Learning & innovation skills (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Curriculum ("selecting instructional methods, materials or resources adaptive to learner's individual needs") (NCBTS Domain 4)
- Planning, assessing & reporting (NCBTS Domain 5)

#### SERVICE -DRIVEN CITIZENS:

- Social regard for learning ("good role model for students") (NCBTS Domain 1)
- Sustainability ("economic, social, environmental, political") (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Global awareness (21<sup>st</sup> century skills)
- Diversity of learners ("respecting individual differences") (NCBTS Domain 3)
- The learning environment ("Creates an environment that promotes fairness, safety & is conducive to learning") (NCBTS Domain 4)
- Community linkages ("Establishes learning environments that respond to the aspirations of the community") (NCBTS Domain 6)
- Personal growth & professional development ("Takes pride in the nobility of the profession") (NCBTS Domain 7)
- Supporters and contributors (OBE's Performance Life Roles)

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in nature. The researchers aimed to find out how the program has helped the sixty participants of the undergraduate Early Childhood Education program in a Catholic University prepare to teach in today's education landscape. They completed at least 300 hours of practicum which included direct and indirect teaching in a private preschool and a Barangay Day Care Center, participation in community outreach activities, attendance to conferences or seminar-workshops, conduct of action research in their practicum site, and construction of an individual practicum portfolio. Data were gathered across three

academic terms through reflective essays based on the following open-ended questions: (1) *What does it take to be a teacher today?* (2) *What do you believe are the things you learned in the university that are most useful in the field?* (3) *What changes can you suggest to improve the program?*

The qualitative data were content analyzed. All responses from the reflective essay were encoded verbatim. From the coded responses, core themes and underlying themes emerged. The researchers then looked into the alignment of the emergent core themes and underlying themes with the University's expected graduate attributes. These graduate attributes cut across the indicators or elements in NCBTS, Spady's OBE's performance life roles, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are organized according to the three reflection questions:

### 3.1 *What it takes to be a teacher today*

Core themes that emerged from the coded responses were dispositional traits, knowledge, and teaching skills. Under dispositional traits, most participants perceived that having the passion to teach, being flexible and adaptable to the needs of diverse learners, being a good role model, critical and creative thinking and innovativeness in one's craft of teaching, staying up-to-date with local and global trends, using technology in the classroom, undertaking research, as well as being open to continuous learning are essential in the teaching profession. Some responses from the participants on continuous learning are:

*"Teachers should not stop learning and researching about different sort of stuffs that can be used inside the classroom or help the child in general."*; *"Should strive to learn continuously so that he/she will be able to update knowledge of quality education"*; and *"You can be an exceptional teacher by loving what you do and continuously wanting and striving to be better."*

Some dispositional traits that were extracted from the responses were "accountable",



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“able to adjust”, “alert”, “approachable”, “calm”, “patient”, “caring”, “hardworking”, “can motivate”, “responsible”, “punctual” “happy”, “helpful”, “high energy”, “resourceful”, and “understanding” among others. Practice of ethical conduct and integrity as one of the notable underlying themes in dispositional traits was revealed through words extracted from the participants’ reflections: “honest”, “good moral character” “credibility”, “good manners”, “protecting the reputation of teachers”, “remaining respectable” and “obeying the law.” Other dispositional traits that emerged reflect a commitment to diversity and social justice, such as “adapting to differences”, and “promoting equality” respectively. Another underlying theme in dispositional traits that was notable is the ability to build relationships. Some responses are: *“A team player”*; *“A teacher seeks to understand people. An ideal teacher should never desire personal gain but rather find a way to understand and establish connections with different people”*; and *“To relate well with colleagues so that there will be a positive, healthy environment for the students and teachers.”*

Most of the respondents also believed that strong content knowledge and pedagogy are important in one’s learning to teach. Some sample responses are: *“You can be a better teacher by familiarizing yourself with trends, theories, books, etc.”*, and *“Teachers are demanded to give higher quality of education to students specifically teaching children to master reading and writing which is required or needed for further education of students.”* Teaching skills that were perceived as important are evident in some of these responses: *“good communication skills”*; *“how to make and implement developmentally appropriate lesson plans”*; and *“how to deal with inclusion of children with diverse backgrounds and needs.”*

Some respondents also perceived that a need for a degree in education and passing the licensure examination are essential in the teaching profession.

Results reveal that the two of the University’s expected graduate attributes, i.e. the reflective lifelong learners and service-driven citizens would help in developing the participants’ dispositional traits which the latter perceived as important in the current context of the teaching profession.

### *3.2 Things learned in school that are most useful in the field*

The foundational and major courses in Early Childhood Education, as well as the professional education courses were perceived by the participants as very useful in their practicum. Theories in child development, developmentally appropriate practices, subject-specific content, pedagogical content knowledge, and specialized knowledge such as First Aid are some of the knowledge they perceived to be very useful.

Two sample responses are: *“It showed me how to teach and also showed me if I were effective as a teacher. I would also be able to know my strengths and weaknesses.”* and *“The different programs taught me valuable aspects of teaching that I must know such as principles of teaching, assessment of student learning and educational tech, teaching profession and other important considerations in education.”*

Majority of them believed that the practicum serves as a valuable avenue to be exposed to the realities of teaching. Sample responses are : *“Practicum was a very crucial opportunity for me to become a teacher since there, I learned, I saw, and experienced what I know it is to become one.”*, *“[practicum] was a training ground that will prepare me to the battle field out there. My experiences in the teacher education will be my “treasures” and my guide as I formally teach.”* and *“I also learned and developed so much – getting to know and experience the different joys and hardships of being a teacher.”*

The conferences and seminar-workshops that the participants attended during practicum were perceived as helpful in their learning to teach. *“Practicum encouraged us to attend seminars that*



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were of great help to us.” Hands-on activities and teaching demonstration in several courses were likewise perceived as useful. Teaching skills they learned in school that they found most useful are creating lesson plans and instructional materials that are adaptive to the learners’ background, applying instructional methods that are developmentally appropriate, the art of questioning, and how to do research. This implies that the NCBS domain 4 (Curriculum) is addressed in the University’s Early Childhood Education program, as well as the University’s graduate attribute, critical and creative thinkers.

The socio-emotional domain of some participants was influenced by the education they received in the University. For instance, some participants viewed the teachers and the University as an inspiration: *“Teachers educate, inspire and touch every learners’ minds, heart and soul.”* and *“...one thing I will take with me as long as I live, is that as an educator, I will teach minds, touch hearts, and transform lives.”* Another participant noted, *“They do not just teach theories and concepts; they also touch our socio-emotional maturity and be able to appreciate the significance of the course that we are taking despite the negative feedback that some people would tell.”* The community outreach activities have allowed students to be socially aware and involved. The coursework also encouraged them to observe, analyze, and evaluate.

Furthermore, professional commitment, confidence, and motivation to become a better teacher were revealed in the reflections of some participants: *“I’m ready to be a teacher.” “I can be brilliant, great simply because I choose to be. I am qualified because I have decided to devote my life to what I am passionate of ---teaching.” “I’m very open into studying more to be a better educator.”* and *“I were taught how to be an independent teacher, who sets goals for the learning outcomes of the students ahead of time.”*

Results reveal that participants learn best through firsthand experience. This can be supported

by what Boud, Cohen, and Walked (1993) noted that “experience is the central consideration of all learning and that learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged at least to some level” (p. 8 in Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009, p. 259).

Being open to continuous learning is also perceived as essential in the participants’ teacher development. It therefore implies that learning to teach is ongoing and continuous. This supports Morisson’s (2009) claims that in being a professional teacher, one must “engage in a continuous, lifelong learning and professional development.” (p.13). Notably, such dispositional trait seemed to be developing in most participants. This could have been attributed by the University’s graduate attributes particularly, reflective lifelong learners and service-driven citizens, that are integrated in the curriculum. Likewise, the University’s Early Childhood Education curriculum addresses the NCBS domain 7, i.e. the personal growth and professional development.

### 3.3 Suggestions to improve the ECED Program

When asked what should be improved in the program, majority of the participants suggested for a longer period in the practicum site. This implies that the participants put emphasis on the application of knowledge in an authentic learning environment. They need to understand how the principles, theories, and pedagogy that they have learned in their courses are translated in classroom context. It is therefore important that pre-service students must be given with a great deal of opportunity to observe, apply and even reflect the knowledge they have gained from their courses.

Other suggestions extracted from the participants’ responses are: “more exposure to public school settings”, “a course on how to teach the mother tongue”, “STEM subjects”, “different electives”, “a subject for health and fitness”, and “more details about the educational system of the country”. Some participants suggested for in-depth learning on the following: “child psychology”, “child development”, “special education”, “classroom management”, “project approach”, “how to promote the skill of problem solving in children”, how to be reflective, instructional material making, how to teach children



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with different learning styles, statistics, and research. Furthermore, some would like to have special training in the following: leadership, how to deal with aggressive parents, how to handle common school problems, and stress management.

The participants were able to provide suggestions that they perceived as important in their preparation to become teachers. It therefore reveals that they are aware that a strong foundation in content knowledge and pedagogy are needed in the teaching profession. Furthermore, scope, breadth and depth in the course content were viewed by the participants as important in their learning to teach effectively.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Dispositional traits, strong foundation in content and pedagogy, as well as skills related to teaching were recognized by the pre-service teacher candidates as essential in the current teaching profession. They found the foundational and major courses, as well as the professional education courses very useful during their practicum. They also value the application of knowledge in an authentic learning environment. They need to be immersed in the practicum site for a longer period. They situate themselves in a continuous process of learning. Therefore learning to teach for them is viewed as ongoing and continuous.

The participants' developing dispositional traits could be attributed by the University's expected graduate attributes particularly, reflective lifelong learners and service-driven citizens.

The participants in this study seem ready to face the challenges of the current educational context, not just because of the knowledge and certain teaching skills and the developing dispositional traits, such as professional commitment, confidence and being open to continuous learning that were revealed in their reflective essays. It is also because they have gained awareness on what they need to know in order for them to teach effectively in the current educational context. It is therefore essential that the undergraduate Early Childhood Education program must provide the pre-service teachers with a variety of opportunities to play an active role in their process of becoming teachers.

This research also implies that the curriculum of the undergraduate Early Childhood Education program must be revisited by the faculty through curriculum mapping. This is to ensure that the program outcomes are translated well in the courses.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would spark an interest among educators to pursue further research on how to best prepare teacher candidates to teach in today's educational context, as well as what knowledge, skills and dispositions do preschool administrators look for in a teacher.

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