

# THE SKILL AND VALUE ENRICHMENT OF STUDENT-TEACHERS THROUGH THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

*The mission of the College of Education Teacher Training Program is to develop future teachers who are adept in their profession and adaptive to social realities. Within the framework of the service-learning program, the College of Education Teacher Training Program emphasizes the importance of helping the student-teachers learn and improve the academic standing of the school beyond classroom instruction. While enhancing their teaching skill, the program also aims to inculcate among the student-teachers the sense of service to the community school in which they are assigned and to their students. Thus, among their various activities in the community are participating in any school activities and interacting with the parents. It is envisioned that the experience these student-teachers gain from their interaction with the community will improve their self-esteem as future teachers.*

### **Introduction**

The mission of the College of Education-Teacher Training Program of Silliman University is to develop future teachers who are adept in their profession and adaptive to social realities. Upon reaching their senior year, students enrolled in teacher education are called student teachers. It is at this level that they take the subject entitled Student Teaching as a form of experiential education. During this time, they are assigned to teach in the laboratory schools of the university, such as the high school and the elementary school, and according to their major field of specialization under the supervision of a critic teacher.

Since these future teachers will not always be employed in private schools located in the city, they have to be exposed to community or public schools under the Department of

Education, Culture and Sports (DECS). In the Philippines, public schools are often plagued with problems of limited teaching materials like textbooks, visual aids, and multi-media equipment used to enhance student learning. Although there is a great need for teachers in the public schools, budgetary problems prevent the hiring of additional teachers. As a consequence, a huge number of teachers remain unemployed although many places, particularly remote barangay, are in great need of teachers. The lack of teachers becomes a perennial problem amidst increasing enrollment which in turn also creates another problem of lack of classrooms. Public school teachers are burdened by these problems which are made worse by their teaching overloads.

### **Practice-Teaching for Real**

As part of the education curriculum, practice-teaching exposes student-teachers to real teaching for one year. Their first exposure is in the laboratory school at Silliman University and is followed by exposure in the community school. The situation at the laboratory schools is far different from the community schools not only in terms of the quality of its facilities but also in terms of the profile of its students who generally come from middle to upper class families. The experiences of student-teachers at the laboratory school of the university are often far different from what they encounter in community schools. It is presumed that if the teaching experience of student-teachers is confined only to the kind of teaching situation at the laboratory schools of Silliman University, they will be unprepared for teaching in the public school system where the community schools are often without adequate learning facilities and the students come from lower income groups.

The foregoing discussion provides the rationale why the student-teachers of the College of Education of Silliman University have to undergo two semesters of practice-teaching, i.e. one in-campus and another off-campus or in the community schools. In-campus practice-teaching is scheduled during the first semester while off-campus teaching is in the second semester. Assigning

students to their respective schools is basically the task of the faculty coordinator. So that the students could experience and overcome the inevitable rigors of being teachers to places designated by the DECS if they later choose the public school system as professional teachers, they are not assigned in their own community.

### **Forging Service-Learning and Practice-Learning**

Practice teaching has a set of expectations that student-teachers have to satisfy at the end of the semester. Besides obtaining a passing grade for their final teaching demonstration which will qualify them for graduation, student-teachers are also required to focus on classroom activities and meet a certain number of days in their assigned schools.

For some, practice-teaching is a difficult part of being a student in teacher education. For others, it is the final test of their ability to teach and be worthy to become real teachers at the end. Depending on their preparation, practice teaching is therefore both an exciting and a challenging experience for students. But on the whole, the main aim of practice teaching is to make it a fulfilling experience for the student-teachers so they will greatly value their career as molders of future leaders.

It is not difficult to integrate service-learning in the practice-teaching program. Because the teaching skill enhancement is already inherent in this program, what is left to be integrated is values education which will inculcate among student-teachers the sense of service to the school and the students. Within the framework of the service learning strategy, among the tasks of the faculty coordinator of practice-teaching is to emphasize among student-teachers the importance of valuing their contribution in teaching their students and in improving the quality of education provided by the school. In other words, the student-teachers are advised to give priority not only to improving their teaching skills for the sake of earning good grades but also to contributing to the academic upliftment of the students. Under the guidance of critic



teachers assigned to them, the student-teachers also perform other work beyond the classroom.

Service-learning encourages student-teachers to provide assistance to individual students with their personal and academic problems and assist the Parents, Teachers and Community Association (PTCA) in enhancing the quality of education in the school to which they are assigned. The integration of service-learning in practice-teaching makes the latter more meaningful to the student-teachers and broadens their participation in the school community. Similarly, being treated by regular teachers as co-equals rather than as student-teachers enhances the student-teachers' personality and self-esteem as well as boosts their morale in the teaching profession. This is particularly important since the teaching profession in this country is not as financially rewarding as other careers.

### **Activities**

Of the total of 29 student-teachers enrolled in practice-teaching, five were assigned in Maluay, the service-learning partner community of the program. One was assigned in the elementary school while four were assigned in the high school in the community. Other student-teachers were assigned in other municipalities within and outside of the province.

For the purpose of this report on the pilot community-based serving-learning program, only the experiences of these five student-teachers are included. The following were the activities during the period the student-teachers lived in the community and taught in the elementary and high schools.

**Preparation.** To prepare the student-teachers for their off-campus work in Maluay, the student teaching supervisor briefed them on the concept of service learning, the principles that governed it, the role of the student-teachers under the program, and the planned activities which they had to undertake for the duration of their practice-teaching.

As a matter of procedure, the College of Education first sought the permission of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Province of DECS to assign student-teachers in both schools in the community. Colleges and universities which field student-teachers in all schools under the DECS jurisdiction are required to coordinate with the Division Superintendent of the Province for monitoring purposes and to prevent legal and technical problems.

Upon receipt of the approval from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the student-teachers immediately reported to the respective principals where they were assigned to teach, accompanied by the faculty coordinator. At this meeting, the student-teachers were briefed of the expectations of the schools to which they were assigned to guide their day-to-day activities.

For the kind of community work they will perform, student-teachers practically live in the community as this would allow them to be involved in other school or community activities beyond class schedules. For this reason, the student-teachers assigned in Maluay also had to look for a place where they could stay throughout the period of their stay in the community.

***Initial Consultation and Assessment.*** During their first two weeks, the student-teachers observed the classes where they were assigned. This allowed them to assess the students' behavior and performance in the class which will guide them in preparing the appropriate teaching strategies and teaching materials. They also needed to learn the classroom management style and teaching strategies of their critic teachers. As part of their training, the student-teachers were expected to be innovative in their response to the particular needs of students and classroom situations. What they have learned in college served as basis for such innovations.

During their practice teaching and field work experience, the student-teachers were required to attend other school activities as well as other activities in the community being coordinated by the school. Their participation in community activities promoted a closer relationship not only with the with the school children but with the parents of the children as well. Thus, for the practice



teaching strategy, these were occasions used for measuring their community involvement.

***Academic and Extra-curricular Activities.*** During the practice teaching, the student-teachers are assigned to teach a particular subject to two or three sections in different year levels. In Maluay, the student-teachers handled Mathematics, Biology, English, and Filipino. In each of these subjects, they were assigned a critic teacher appointed by the school principal to guide them in handling their respective classes.

Since the student-teachers were also assigned to specific sections and classrooms which they were to advise and maintain, they were practically considered as real teachers in the community. Besides preparing their teaching materials, they also took care of classroom arrangement, set up bulletin board displays, organized variety shows, joined the choir during the mass in school, and attended the regular meetings of the PTCA. They also prepared the grades of students in their classes and helped in the distribution of cards.

### **Problems and Mitigations**

Off-campus practice-teaching, however, is not as easy as it sounds. The preparation it takes to get the student-teachers finally to their assigned community is horrendous. Since no community school will accept any student-teacher without the approval of the Schools Division Office, an official permission from the said office must be sought first and this often takes time. This explains why the fielding of student teachers in Maluay was delayed for a month because the request was not approved on time. From that experience, it was realized that the request for the next school year has to be done many months ahead during the next school year to prevent the delay in starting the practice teaching and to give the student-teachers more opportunities for undertaking this assignment.

Another problem is the availability of appropriate and quality teaching materials. It is a sad fact that when the instructional

materials of a particular school are limited, the learning of students is bound to be adversely affected. In anticipation of this unfavorable situation, the student-teachers produced their own teaching devices using cartolina, colored papers, adhesive, and other materials provided by the school. In this activity, the student-teachers relied on their creativity to put into practice the lesson they have learned in visual materials production in college. The instructional materials they produced were consistent with the topics they handled.

In addition to normal classroom instruction, the student-teachers also organized tutorial classes for slow learners who needed help with their classroom performance and these sessions were usually held after classes in the afternoon. Unfortunately, not all slow learners could attend the after-class tutorial sessions because they lived far away from the school. Nor could they come for the Saturday sessions because their parents usually required them to do all household chores or help at the farm. To mitigate these problems, the student-teachers rescheduled the tutorial classes during their students' vacant period in the school. Unfortunately, this allowed only too short a time for tutorial classes.

Another problem faced by the student-teachers was the effect of household chores on the academic performance of the students. Because children in rural communities are expected, even at a young age, to perform household chores after school, they have either only limited time for school assignments or are too tired to do them for the following school day. This is particularly the case since majority of the students come from poor families. A study conducted by two student-teachers showing the connection between students' housework and their academic performance validated this observation. Because the poor students had no time to review their lessons at home, the student-teachers were forced to review and recall every meeting the previous lesson taken up in class. This delayed the teaching process and reduced the number of expected lessons to be covered within a given period. Nevertheless, this teaching strategy helped the students to learn at their own pace.



### **Accomplishments**

#### ***Completion of the Practice-Teaching Requirement.***

Towards the end of their program, the student-teachers conducted final teaching demonstrations attended by their critic teachers and the faculty of the College of Education. This was one of the basis for their grades in addition to their regular attendance in the sessions with their faculty coordinators who processed their experiences in community teaching. Although the teaching demonstration did not mean the end of their work in the elementary and high schools in Maluay, the student-teachers had to return to Silliman University to attend their graduation which took place earlier than the closing of classes in the public school. After their graduation, they went back to Maluay and continued handling their classes. At the end of the school term, they helped prepare the school documents of the students assigned to them.

The five student-teachers assigned in Maluay completed their school year. Although, they taught and served the schools in Maluay only for a total of four months, they were able to contribute to the academic well-being of the students. At the end of their program, the principal and the critic teachers assigned to them expressed appreciation for the student-teachers and commended them for their performance. For their part, the students expressed their gratitude to their student-teachers for their help not only in classroom instructions and in their tutorial classes, but in personal matters as well.

***Tutorial Classes.*** The student teachers organized tutorial classes for slow learners in their respective classes. Although there were problems encountered, the slow learners were helped to cope with their lessons. Unfortunately, no follow-up study was conducted to measure the effect of this tutorial session.

***Conducting a Study on the Effect of Homework on the Performance of Students.*** As mentioned earlier, two student-teachers also conducted a study on the effect of homework on the academic performance of first year high school students in Maluay. This results of this study, conducted as part of a requirement



in Educational Research, were shared with the teachers and parents through the school principal. This student-teachers also presented and defended the results of their study in the school before the principal and the teachers from the college. A copy was given to the school to help the principal design mechanisms to academically assist students who are burdened with house work.

***Final Teaching Demonstration.*** In order to measure how much they have learned in practice teaching, the student-teachers were required to conduct a teaching demonstration in the presence of their critic teachers and faculty of the College of Education. They were expected to demonstrate improvement in their teaching skills based on the guidelines used in rating them.

### **Some Experiences and Reflections of Students**

In addition to the regularly scheduled processing of their problems and experiences during the whole semester in the College, student-teachers were expected to complete a set of evaluation questions given them after their practice teaching. Results of this evaluation showed changes not only in the grades of the students the student-teachers taught but also in the values of the student teachers themselves. In addition, they evidenced a noticeable development of expertise in their fields of specialization. The following experiences and reflections of the five student-teachers taken from their responses to those evaluation questions reveal the significance of their exposure in community school and how this has enriched their skills in teaching and their values in life.

#### ***Valued Experiences***

- “ I considered my stay in this school as my most significant experience. I felt very much fulfilled when my students, most especially, reminded me not to give up no matter what problems may arise.
- “ I valued the time I acted as a real teacher and a second mother

to them, especially helping them with their problem in school and their family. I really appreciated the way they respected me.

- “ I realized the value of cooperation among fellow teachers.
- “ Promptness is a very important trait that a teacher should possess.
- “ I believe that becoming a regular teacher in a particular school has to be coupled with honor and responsibility.
- “ I was able to touch the lives of my students and see the true essence of teaching. In assessing the academic performance of this group of students, I had to consider the connection between their status and their academic performance.

#### ***How the Experience Improved the Student-Teachers***

- “ Experience is the best way to enhance the skills of a particular person especially in this professional field. Interacting with the students even in a short span of time, 5 days a week, 8 hours a day, is beneficial if we are to develop ourselves as student teachers.
- “ Yes, I think I did improve not only in my teaching style but also on the way I view life now.
- “ Practice-teaching helped me a lot in dealing with varied kinds of students especially in a rural community.
- “ Practice-teaching made me always alert and taught me to come to class prepared.



*Contribution to the Academic Improvement of Students*

- “ I think the students became exposed to teaching strategies that they have never encountered before in this school.
  
- “ I was probably able to develop their self-confidence necessary for them to excel in any endeavor. Similarly, they helped me improve mine.