Experiences of First-Time Teachers for Senior High School: Implications to Faculty Development

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Abstract: This study investigated the experiences of first-time teachers in the Senior High School Program of St. Paul University Manila. Eight teachers, selected and interviewed by their respective senior high school students via an unstructured interview approach, revealed that they felt insecure, excited but anxious, and uncertain about the senior high school program, but were willing to learn, and positive and passionate about their entry into teaching. Inputs based on the emergent themes were presented for consideration in a faculty development program designed specifically for first-time senior high school teachers.

Key Words: First-time Teachers, Senior High School, Faculty Development, St. Paul University Manila

I.   Introduction

In 2015, St. Paul University Manila opened its Senior High School Program, a year ahead of other schools. It started with less than ten students in Grade 11 who were taught by university teachers who volunteered their vacant time to teach. These teachers were experienced teachers at the college level and had the inner and technical resources to survive their baptism of fire in the said program without benefit from literature or experiences of teachers in other schools. With less than 10 students, their difficulty is nothing compared to the teachers of the following batch of students totaling more than 600.

Eventually, the university had to hire teachers to address the learning needs of the more numerous batches of Grade 11 students. The problem was not many applicants had training in the new Senior High School Program of the Department of Education, education graduates or otherwise. The greater problem was that education graduates were not keen on entering private schools because public schools gave higher entry-level salaries, compliant with the law. Thus, non-education graduates who were seeking to get employed for the first time, and those seeking to shift to a new career in basic education from their previous non-education jobs outnumbered education graduates who were applying for teaching posts in schools like St. Paul University Manila. Furthermore, only a few college teachers were enthusiastic about taking teaching loads from the said program because of the different work arrangements and pay grades that were to their disadvantage. While the new Senior High School Program allowed non-education graduates to teach specialized courses (for example, engineers can teach math and science courses), teaching is expected to be a hurdle for them, which, if not helped, could get in the way of students' optimal learning.

Rationale. Given this scenario, the university and other higher education institutions that experience the same situation are challenged to help non-education graduates who were hired as teachers in the new Senior High School Program to become effective teachers of a new generation of learners. However, since there is no

set bar for such "new" teachers because practically most, if not all, teachers in the program are first-timers, a faculty development program may be more appropriate if it addressed the concerns of such teachers specific to their experiences in the university, instead of one that is based on expectations indicated in policy that lack any basis on actual teaching performance in mandated new courses. Thus, this paper sought to draw out salient points in the first-time teachers' experiences to help in the design of an intervention program unique to St. Paul University Manila.

Review of Literature

Comparing Teaching Performance. Good college preparation is key to forming good teachers (Rees, 2015). Teachers who graduated from an education program were found ready to take on their responsibilities because schools with teacher education programs abide by government-imposed quality standards in teaching that were implemented to produce competent educators. As such, it is expected that those teachers who did not receive an education degree will have more difficulties compared to an education graduate when it comes to actual teaching. Lacking actual classroom experience and guidance in classroom management, student evaluation, and having wrong assumptions about students can put non-education graduates in a crisis (Journal Times, 2013).

Differences in the performance of new teachers (one to two years of experience in teaching) and experienced ones are to be expected. The same goes for the performance of non-education graduates who teach for the first time and those with education degrees. Thus, a small difference between either of the two groups could mean that (1) either teacher preparation in colleges and universities is doing an excellent job in training future teachers, or in the case of the latter, non-education programs from any discipline are equally competent in forming teachers out of students who initially did not intend to teach; or that (2) the experienced teachers have not advanced in their teaching, or for the latter, that the preparation of education graduates do not give them any advantage over non-education graduates (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). Comparing the performance of experienced and novice teachers, hence, provides valuable information for the development of faculty development programs.

Teaching for the first time can be a dramatic experience for both education and non-education graduates. The emotional experiences of first-time instructors (with graduate degrees) in the university were found to be a mix of negative and positive emotions across sexes, and ethnicities (Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014). Struggles were significantly related to the gap between their expectations and actual experiences in the classroom. However, those who taught using more group activities reported having more positive experiences. Any form of assistance provided by the school to help the teachers to perform better, such as course meetings and support group style meetings, were deemed beneficial only to a limited extent as not all teachers found them useful. This suggests that interventions to assist first-time teachers must attend to actual needs.

Burnout and Support of First-Time Teachers. First-time teachers were also found to experience burnout, despite being in the early stage of teaching. Predictors of burnout were "(a) lack of appreciation and professional recognition from students; (b) lack of appreciation and professional recognition from the public; and (c) lack of collaborative and supportive ambiance" (Gavish & Friedman, 2010, p. 141). On the contrary, since first-time teachers are socialized into the profession, it was found that "teacher efficacy was higher in schools where collective efficacy was higher" (Knobloch & Whittington, 2002, p. 337). Collective efficacy is defined as the shared belief of teachers that they can develop and implement courses of action critical to student success (Bandura 1997 in Knobloch & Whittington, 2002). First-time teachers, known to have lower self-efficacy beliefs compared to experienced teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, n.d.), may benefit from collective efficacy enhancement programs that include the latter. Meanwhile, early departures of new teachers from teaching were found among those with lower self-efficacy beliefs. Visible leadership, too, was identified as necessary for first-time teachers to grow into their profession (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). That said, burnout may be addressed by enhancing the collective efficacy of first-time teachers among them by implementing

course-focused and support-oriented meetings involving experienced teachers and administrators (Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014) in the first five years since entry, especially into the science-teaching profession (Henry, Fortner, & Bastian, 2012).

Middle School vs. Senior High School Students*.* In the Philippines, the term middle school is not used. However, the middle school equivalent in the country are students who are between Grades 7 and 10. Countries that have middle schools differentiate between middle schoolers and senior high schoolers. In New York City, in the United States, middle school students are described as developing autonomy, and as a consequence, tend to move away from adult-supervised activities during non-school hours compared to lower elementary students (The Wallace Foundation, 2018). This should be clear to education graduates in college, especially those who intend to teach at either level. This distinction will not be as apparent to a non-education graduate unless he or she has a child or children who bring/s that to his attention daily. This reality among middle school students might be a particularly difficult situation to handle for a first-time teacher who is still struggling with his self-efficacy belief. Disengagement with standard school activities and inconsistencies in academic performance that start at around Grade 8, requiring a lot more listening to their non-verbal communication cues, will be a major challenge to first-time teachers if experienced teachers do not warn or prepare them for it with strategies that are most suited to such a group of learners.

Senior high school students are more independent than middle schoolers and can deliberately make choices about how to spend their time and exercise their freedoms (The Wallace Foundation, 2018). They look forward to graduation and are "really are motivated to be there, and they're doing it because they *want to*—not because they *have to*" (para. 18). They are more motivated by content compared to middle schoolers and are more engaged in other responsibilities outside of the classroom. This situation may be more favorable to the non-education graduate first-time teacher as it allows them to be more hands-off but teaching conventions before the institutionalization of senior high school in the Philippines did not highlight independence and autonomy (learner-centered approach), and first-time teachers may carry the older teacher-centered approach with them, for the most part, to their disadvantage. As such, they need to undergo an unlearning and retooling process, as most teachers in the Philippines, even those teaching in college, were required to do before they are allowed to handle these older students more effectively. To say the least, non-education first-time teachers will have a lot to hurdle in either middle school or senior high school.

Study Framework. This study intends to provide input to a faculty development program for senior high school teachers by looking at their experiences as first-time teachers in senior high school in St. Paul University Manila. This means that those teaching in senior high school are expected to face three challenges. First, they have to handle the challenges of being a first-time teacher. Second, they need to confront the challenges of handling senior high school students and courses for the first time. Third, they also need to deal with their being first-time teachers at St. Paul University Manila. These different 'first-times' constitute the composite experience of their being teachers which must be put to light to enable the university to develop support systems that will make them better instruments of educational delivery. Figure 1 below shows the Input-Process-Output model as applied to the study's variables. The input is composed of the experiences, from which insights were drawn out, and inputs were put together for faculty development in senior high school at St. Paul University Manila.
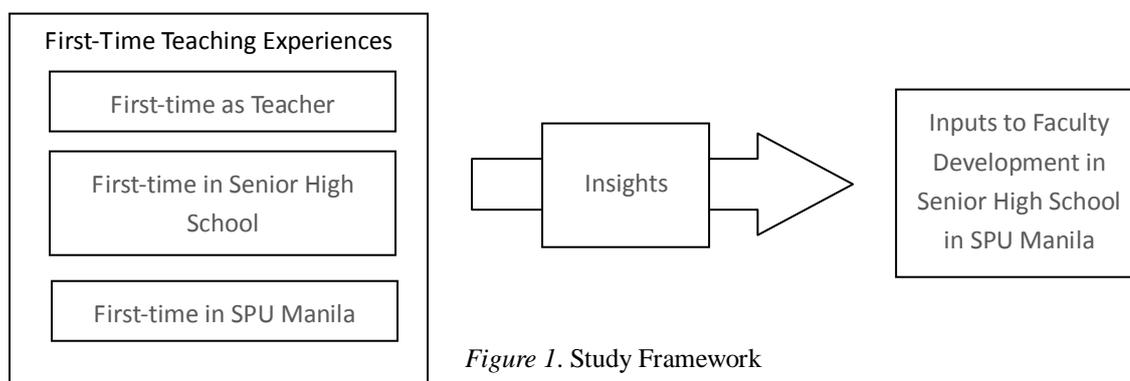
Figure 1. Study Framework

Statement of the Problem. In an attempt to assist first-time teachers in the senior high school program of St. Paul University Manila, this study aimed to come up with inputs that will inform the development of a faculty development program for first-time teachers. To arrive at the desired results, this study sought to answer the following specific questions: (1) What are the experiences of the first-time teachers of the senior high school program of St. Paul University Manila; (2) What insights can be drawn from the said experiences?; and (3) What inputs to faculty development can be generated from the said insights?

II.   Methodology

This study used a qualitative design. Grade 11 students enrolled in a qualitative research course were asked to interview teachers of their choice. Students were given the task to interview for students to understand their teachers more. The eight selected new teachers, three of whom were male and five female, were asked about their experiences as first-time teachers in the senior high school program at St. Paul University Manila via an unstructured interview approach. The interviews were recorded and transcribed thereafter. Textual analysis was used in constructing data and from the transcript, and insights were derived so that inputs on the faculty development in senior high school could be addressed at three levels of the university and presented for consideration, respectively.

III.   Results and Discussions

Profile. The interviewees came from different fields before entry as a teacher at St. Paul University Manila. One was a fresh college graduate in education. Two were from the media. One came from the corporate world. One trained to be an engineer. Another was previously a counselor, and one more came from the medical field. The last interviewee did not say anything about his previous work background; instead, he pointed out that he was happy deciding to be a teacher.

Themes. The interviews generated seven themes that were relevant to their being first-time teachers at St. Paul University Manila. They are as follows:

Unplanned and Unprepared Entry. Except for a single interviewee who recently finished a degree in education, the others did not plan to become teachers. They said:

By chance, honestly, by chance…;

Napagpilian ko noon (I was choosing between)… *maging* doctor (o) nurse (becoming a doctor or nurse)…;

… *hindi ko siya naisipan* (I never thought of becoming a teacher) *kasi gusto kong maging* engineer (because I wanted to be an engineer)…;

… I have been an office girl for almost five or six years… so being in the educational setting… is very different…;

I was a guidance counselor… *tapos ngayon* teacher *na ako* (but now I am a teacher)"

Most of them planned on pursuing other careers before their teaching. However, the opportunities that opened as a result of the implementation of the Senior High School Program presented an option that they could not resist. However, they did not prepare in advance for the career shift. This means that most first-time teachers will start with zero teaching knowledge and experience. If any, the desire to teach is present.

The table below indicates the areas where the interviewees are found to be first-timers:

Table 1. *Distribution in areas where interviewees were first-timers in*

First-time Teachers	First-time Teachers in St. Paul University Manila	First-time Senior High School Teachers
7	8	8

Filled with Excitement and Anxiety. Entering a new career, all of them were excited to take on the new challenge of teaching. Though they were eager to teach, they faced concerns related to preparing lessons, relationships with students, and getting the job done. These showed indications of doubt in self-efficacy, as manifested in the following responses:

I don't know what kind of teacher to be;

I am not ready as a teacher;

I have hesitations as a teacher;

I am so young to teach;

I struggle with external expectations;

I need to adjust;

Students are so different from teachers now;

There will be high expectations from co-teachers;

There will be high expectations from students;

I question my capacity as a teacher;

I am still learning as a teacher;

There are lots of differences between (junior) high school and senior high school;

You have to fight and prove that you are good;

I have less patience (now).

The quotes above indicate that there are external and internal pressures that create anxieties in teachers. Internally, they are not sure about their adequacy as a teacher. There is an acknowledgment that they do not know enough; hence, they are still learning and will need to adjust. There is also a realization that students of the current generation are different from the past and that senior high school students will be different from their

juniors. Without an idea of just how different things are from where they were as students themselves, the teachers will find it hard to design their lessons according to students' needs and capacities.

Braving Uncertainties of K-12. Despite all of them not knowing what is in store for teachers in the K-12 Program, all of them highlighted the necessity to deliver well as a teacher. They reflected good intentions for the students and were keen on doing their best to make the students learn. They said:

I need to be a high-standard teacher;

I need to integrate experiences;

I have to be realistic;

My mission is to inform and enlighten;

I need to train (students) as mature (persons);

I am wishing the best for the students;

I need to put the effort into preparing lessons;

I need to understand the students;

No (one) should be left behind;

The present has to be faced;

I have to teach with passion;

Learning from students (is important).

Their answers reveal that despite being first-time senior high school teachers at St. Paul University Manila, they are well-motivated to do well. They do not let the upcoming and unpredictable challenges overtake them. While they are realistic in their approach towards the challenges of K-12, particularly expecting them to do more as "senior high school students have more to give", they are also focused on the well-being of the students that relies on their good performance as teachers.

Openness to Learning. Their responses show that they are willing to learn more about teaching as they go about making adjustments according to the new curriculum and old and new expectations on teachers.

Education needs reforms;

I need to study the lessons (more);

I am struggling to be better;

Teaching is not an easy job;

I still study;

I need to study the manual;

Be careful what you teach;

The teaching level should rise;

Learning is a lifetime process;

Thank you, K-12.

There are indications that the teachers desire to improve themselves because they entered a program that responds to the challenge of improving the educational system. The responses below show readiness to upgrade one's knowledge and skills to become the teacher that is needed to deliver the new curriculum.

Showing Positivity and Passion. The teachers revealed that their response to their being new or first-time teachers arises from their sense of positivity and passion.

Teachers (perform) as actors;

Teaching is more than the salary;

(I like) new experiences;

New experiences are fulfilling;

I am a Paulinian;

I can deal with different types of people;

It is good to be with the young;

It feels good to give;

Some students seek advice;

Never give up what you love;

Love your passion;

I love my choice;

Challenges inspire;

Teach with passion;

Teaching is no easy job but gives satisfaction;

I can't see life outside of teaching. This is life at the moment;

My reason for teaching is happiness;

You can always have time for the things that you love;

I have no expectation but to be happy;

Their responses reveal that they entered the profession from a good place, a place in which they desire and associate with satisfaction. Despite not having been prepared as a teacher, all, except one, expressed resonance with teaching which translates into a positive outlook and attitude towards a profession that calls for a generous spirit.

Inputs to Faculty Development in Senior High School in St. Paul University Manila

The themes that surfaced from the interviews point to areas that the university can address in different ways. Table 2 below shows the different actions that can be under three umbrellas where the first-time teachers belong.

Table 2. *Inputs to Faculty Development under three Areas of Engagement in St. Paul University Manila*

Themes	Senior High School	Academic Services –	Human Resources

	Department – Faculty Development	**Faculty Development**	**Department - Institutional Employee Development**
Unplanned and Unprepared Entry	12 units of Teacher Certificate Courses needed for Licensure Examination for Teachers	Opportunity to Enroll in Master's degree Programs	Personality and Professional Development Trainings
Filled with Excitement and Anxiety	Regular Faculty Meetings in SHS	Regular Faculty Development Trainings	Regular General Employee Meetings
Braving Uncertainties of K-12	K-12 Related Trainings	Training on University-Alignment with New General Education Curriculum	Satisfaction of K-12 Requirements for Teachers
Openness to Learning	Instruction-Related Learning	Research-Related Learning	Presentation of Life-long Learning Programs available in the SPU System and others preferred by the university (i.e. CHED Programs, if any).
Showing Positivity and Passion	Community Building	Inspirational Talks	Core Values and Paulinian Ethics Orientation

On Unplanned and Unprepared Entry

1. *Senior High School Department – Faculty Development*. Since the Department of Education requires that all Senior High School teachers must have a license to teach core courses, those whom the department intends to keep after two years of probation must immediately be required to take the necessary 12 units of education courses to enable them to take the licensure examination for teachers at the soonest possible time.

2. *Academic Services – Faculty Development.* Meanwhile, because the Senior High School Program will require teachers with Master's degrees to teach the specialized courses, the Office of the Vice President for Academic Services must help identify senior high school teachers who will be tasked to teach said courses enlist in the Master's degree programs of the university where they are aligned.

3. *Human Resources - Institutional Employee Development.* As teachers, the Human Resources Department of the university must require all senior high school students to acquire the necessary skills upgrading in common areas like language proficiency, counseling, conflict management, and personality development.

On Excitement and Anxiety

1. *Senior High School Department - Faculty Development.* Anxieties must be managed so that excitement to teach does not wane after the entry of the first-time senior high school teachers. Course-focused and support-oriented meetings (Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014) in the department must be organized and sustained so that the teachers' needs and concerns can be addressed at their level.

2. *Academic Services – Faculty Development.* Faculty development training such as new trends in higher education, internationalization or intercultural activities, gender and development training, and

inclusive education orientations that are offered at the college level must be opened to senior high school teachers so that all faculty members of the university are on the same page regarding issues that impact the institution as a university, and develop the skills necessary to address said issues.

3. *Human Resources - Institutional Employee Development.* Meetings that concern all employees, especially addressing policies, ranking and promotion, benefits, and the like, must include the senior high school teachers since they operate alongside the college teachers under one policy. Those who are being eyed for regular employment must be oriented on the requirements for regularization. Otherwise, said teachers must have an annual policy orientation, especially concerning updates in the policy.

On Braving Uncertainties of K-12

1. *Senior High School Department – Faculty Development.* K-12-related training must be made constantly available to new senior high school teachers. For those who are in their second year, reflections on how K-12 implementation must be improved in the university must be discussed in a forum, to which the college teachers who are given loads in the senior high school program are to be invited.

2. *Academic Services – Faculty Development.* Since senior high school students are being prepared to enter university should they opt to, their teachers must know the standards that are set in place for the New General Education Program at the university or college level. That said, orientations and training on the content of the new general education curriculum must be opened to senior high school students to make sure that the learning continuum between senior high school and the university is ensured.

3. *Human Resources - Institutional Employee Development.* Since the Department of Education that oversees the implementation of the Senior High School Program requires specific credentials from its teachers, the Human Resources Department of St. Paul University Manila should find ways to make sure that such requirements are satisfied before the grace period given to earn those credentials expires.

On Openness to Learning

1. *Senior High School Department – Faculty Development.* Because most of the senior high school teachers have no education degrees, they need to be made aware of the standards in teaching in senior high school. Hence, the Senior High School Department must institutionalize a ladderized approach to orienting new teachers about proper instruction in senior high school, where those who have taken the pre-entry basic orientation will be made to attend a second-tier orientation that addresses actual instructional challenges they faced in their first year.

2. *Academic Services – Faculty Development.* K-12 requires a senior high school program that could adequately prepare students for university work that requires research competency. Thus, senior high school teachers must participate in capacity-building sessions with college faculty members to make sure that their knowledge and skills in research are at par with university standards. Research ethics orientation must be a required session for all senior high school teachers who are tasked to require research-based outputs from their students.

3. *Human Resources - Institutional Employee Development.* Life-long learning being the long-term objective of higher education, must be reflected in the human resource development program of the university. Preferred programs for higher degrees, such as the CHED scholarship grants (if available), especially those offered in the St. Paul University System schools must be presented regularly to the first-time teachers in senior high school.

On Showing Positivity and Passion

1. *Senior High School Department – Faculty Development.* Community-building activities among senior high school teachers must become part of its yearly plans to sustain the positivity and passion that said

teachers have for teaching in the senior high school. Annual parties and celebrations at their level must be organized to build a stronger sense of camaraderie among them. These events are not course- or issue-related; instead, these are celebratory to create positive memories among them.

2. *Academic Services – Faculty Development.* Inspirational talks must be made available to senior high school and college teachers. These are talks that share real experiences of educators that are worth aspiring for. Role models in education must be invited to the university and interactions with them across academic units must be made part of the program. Because academic loads tend to be heavy and challenging to teachers in St. Paul University Manila across levels, these talks can truly uplift the spirit of burdened educators. This serves as a benchmarking activity for teachers in the university, most especially first-time teachers.

3. *Human Resources - Institutional Employee Development.* While annual retreats are held for the benefit of all employees, the Human Resources Department of St. Paul University Manila should allow senior high school teachers to participate in the annual Paulinian Educators' Congress in real time, or if finances pose a challenge, though video-recordings. The department should also create a required reading for all teachers, particularly focusing on Paulinian educators who have made a difference in the lives of their students and those outside of the university. Regardless of form, Paulinian core values and ethics in education should be the focus of the interventions that should be used or implemented.

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