

“THE MEANING OF TRAININGS AND SEMINARS TO PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS: SOME STORIES TO TELL”

LORNA M. ALESTRE (AUTHOR)

Graduate School, University of Mindanao, Davao City,

lorna_alestre@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to draw out different experiences of public school teachers on trainings and seminars and how they perceived these activities in relation to their professional development and advancement. Fourteen public elementary school teachers from Bansalan, Davao del Sur were chosen through purposeful sampling. Results derived from the interviews were coded and transcribed to come up and present major themes and core ideas. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion it was presented that instructional skills enhancement, personal growth, insufficient support, and discontent and disillusionment were the perceived meanings of trainings and seminars for public school teachers. As to the strategies they used to avail of different professional enhancements: stepping up and volunteering, self-financing and initiative, and hopeful waiting. This study is significant for public school teachers to be motivated to attend trainings and seminars especially those sponsored by the Department of Education for personal and professional development.

Keywords:

Professional development. Formal and informal means of helping teachers not only learn new skills but also develop new insights into pedagogy and their own practice, and explore new or advanced understandings of content and resources.

Seminars. In education, it is gathering of people for the purpose of discussing a stated topic. It is usually interactive sessions where the participants engage in discussions about the delineated topic. It is usually headed or led by presenters to steer the discussion along the desired path.

INTRODUCTION

While it is generally agreed that teachers can mold the learning of young people, there remains considerable issues that are raised to the national and local-level policies and programs that best support teachers and their professional growth in terms of knowledge, skills and aptitude. Policies that help develop teachers must include the level of schooling teachers should have, the length of training they need and what professional development and support they should be able to experience and access in order to fulfill their great roles in the community (Crawford, 2000).

Teacher development provides opportunities for students to learn more. Thirty years ago it was accepted that simply exposing the teacher to new concept or skill has nothing to do with classroom and learning development of students. Educators used lecture style – telling, showing, and explaining how something can be done. And when the “learning” is finished, the teachers are back into the choppy waters of their classrooms without so much as a life preserver; teachers were given very little or ineffective ongoing support from their district without giving them opportunities to learn new ideas and acquire new skills (Crawford, 2000).

Great teachers produce great students. Research shows that an inspiring and informed teacher is one of the most important school-related factors in influencing and propelling student achievement, so it is significant to pay close attention to train and support both new and experienced educators.

Much of teachers work entails speaking at conferences and teaching in workshops. At least half of time is devoted to these kinds of events. Speaking to large groups and small groups, entire organizations and departments, associations and focus group, talk about [leadership](#), [organizational culture](#), [behavior](#), and every other training and development is a hot button issue. But there is a problem with these kinds of events. They aren't a substitute for real learning. They provide useful information. Sometimes they even inspire teachers only for a few days (Grimmett and MacKinnon, 1992).

The problem is that real learning, the kind that fundamentally changes teachers for the better and improves teachers' lives is not provided. It's not on PowerPoint slides and glossy handouts that define development of teachers. Real learning and growth is a process that takes place when teachers attempt to consistently apply the ideas they have been exposed to. Teachers cannot learn, in the true sense of the word, during a conference or a workshop. At best, teachers can be exposed to principles that resonate within them. Unfortunately, that is where the educational system falls short (Grimmett and MacKinnon, 1992).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the experiences of teachers in attending trainings and seminars, the benefits and meaning of these activities to their personal life and its importance in improving their performance as well as its impact on student learning outcome. It would help teachers improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness of activities to enhance professional career growth. In fact, research shows that an inspiring and informed teacher is the most important factor in influencing student achievement and learning, so it is critical to pay close attention to train and support educators in any way possible.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the experiences of teachers in attending trainings and seminars sponsored by DepEd?

What are the consequences expected by teachers upon completion of professional development activities like attending trainings and seminars?

METHODOLOGY

Presented in this chapter are the nature of the study, the research design used with regard to presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researcher, research participants, the data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness which includes the following: confirmability, transferability and dependability of the study and all individuals involved and the ethical considerations in the process.

Research Design

In this research study, I applied descriptive qualitative method particularly phenomenology. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of human perception of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through lengthy discussions (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007; Willis, 2011).

I used the phenomenological approach because it is a powerful tool in getting a clear understanding of human experiences, penetrating into their thoughts, feelings and actions in order to gain insights from their experiences. It clearly illustrates the specific details of the experience and how they are seen by the subjects in the situation. It is an appropriate instrument in my study wherein I need to envision and explore the actual experiences of my participants the true meaning of training and seminars in their lives.

Role of the Researcher

Teachers taking different training and seminars in the workplace do not always recognize the insights taken from their trainings and seminars, because most professional development opportunities for educators are still lecture style – telling, showing, and explaining how something can be done. And when the “learning” is finished, the teachers have bigger possibilities to forget the essence of the seminars and trainings they have attended.

Being a parent myself, a teacher and a Doctor in Education student, this research has a personal bearing for me. I personally gathered the data by conducting the in-depth interviews with all the seven informants and seven participants for the FGD, which I also facilitated with the assistance of a colleague who took notes during the interviews and FGD and served as one of my independent readers and analysts. Moreover, I asked the assistance from another independent reader and analyst. We analyzed the data gathered from the audio recordings of the interviews and FGD. After coming up with the same findings, I employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis and interpretation and thereafter, formed my personal insights.

Research Participants

There were 14 public elementary school teachers and were considered as participants of the study and they were grouped as follows: seven for focus group discussion and seven for in –depth interview. The participants of the study were teachers coming from our district who rendered ten years or more in teaching experience and ages between 30 and 40 because I believed that these teachers have more stories to tell about the true meaning of training and seminars in their field of specialization. I also believe that this is a considerable number of participants, adequate to give credible information and significant results and findings.

Moreover, researchers could adopt 5-25 individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon for in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). Relative to this, in qualitative research, the researcher pursues knowledge by deeply penetrating to the core of the experience, to seek the essence of a phenomenon, not how many people who have experienced such phenomena (Englander, 2012). Furthermore, central figures in the development of psychology such as Freud, Piaget and Skinner developed their theories

based on research, involving only a minimal number of subjects and without depending on statistical analysis (Giorgi, 2009; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Roll-Peterson, 2011).

Data Collection

In the collection of data of the study, I have undergone these processes namely: interviewing in-depth with the study-informants, conducting focus group discussion with the participants and note-taking. Before conducting the actual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants, I made sure that ethical considerations were properly observed. I applied the key principles of ethical issues (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006;Bricki and Green, 2007;Kaiser, 2009; Mack et al, 2005) that should be considered in any research study which are consent and confidentiality.

Since *establishing rapport is an essential component of an interview* (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), I arranged a preliminary meeting with them and explained the details of the study, made them understand that everything would be done in confidentiality. After gaining their trust, I asked them to sign a written consent. Essentially, rapport involves trust and respect for the interviewee and the information he/she shares. It is very important to provide him/her a safe and comfortable environment for sharing his/her personal experiences (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). To comply with the requirement, I made sure that the setting of the interview was conducted in a quiet room that would ensure privacy and away from distractions like a private office or in the comfort of their homes, if they prefer.

In-depth interview is one approach that was undertaken in order to gather information from the study informants. The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Mack et al, 2005). It is more than just an approach to understand the participant's experiences but it is going deeper into their thoughts and behavior, listening to their inner voice to explore new issues. Through the interview process, the researcher listened to the participants' descriptions and then repeatedly reviewed and studied the data as they were transcribed (Penner and McClement, 2008). This strategy required time and space so that I could draw out portions of experiences and insights from the informants. First, I had to make my participants feel comfortable and conveyed the message that I am interested in what they were saying. It is important to closely internalize what the informants would share, particularly on the meaning and impact of training and seminars to their lives as a teacher.

Analysis of data

Analysis of data in a research study involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hancock et al, 2007). Data were analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007), adding that qualitative content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

Data reduction is the abstraction of data from the transcriptions, deleting data which are not important and transforming it into a comprehensible material, easily understood by many (Namey et al., 2007;Paul, 2006; Suter; 2012). This pairing and sieving of data is often termed as thematic analysis, a form of sorting and categorizing. With data reduction, I employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis. She helped me manage and handle the data, particularly with the sorting and organizing large volumes of qualitative data, retrieving and locating words and phrases. The data came out consolidated and manageable after being sorted and categorized.

Data display on the other hand is the organization of data and showing it in the form of graphic organizers such as: matrices, charts, graphs, that would enable the viewer to draw his conclusion (Suter, 2012). It is one step beyond data reduction, showing the data in an arranged and orderly manner, clearly showing the interrelationships of bits of information, readily available to the viewer. At this stage, other

higher order categories could come out that was beyond those discovered during the first step of data reduction (Namey et al, 2007; Paul, 2006; Sitko, 2013).

Conclusion drawing and verification was the last step of qualitative analysis. It involves going back to consider what the analyzed data mean and to assess their aftermaths for the questions at hand while verification, integrally linked to conclusion drawing, required revisiting the data as many times as necessary to cross-check or verify these emergent conclusions (Paul, 2006). At this point, no definitive judgments were made but rather, the data were allowed to "speak for themselves" by the emergence of conceptual categories and descriptive themes. These themes were usually implanted in a structure of interconnected ideas that are significant.

The conceptual framework was interpreted with reference to the related literature on the subject in an attempt to explain, with a theory, the phenomenon being studied, by the researcher with the assistance of two independent readers and analysts who are experts in the field of study to form a triangulation team wherein each examined the data and compared individual findings to obtain a deeper and broader understanding of how each investigator viewed the issue. Triangulation is used to ensure the validity of the data by using more than one person to collect the data, thereby increases its reliability (My-Peer Toolkit, 2010; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007).

Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, I observed its four components. These are the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability. To establish the credibility of my study, I ensured that rigor was properly observed during the data collection especially during the interviews, wherein I avoided drawing conclusions from the interviews but based everything on factual data, directly from the participants. I pointed out that no relevant data was excluded and no irrelevant data was included. To address the confirmability of my study, I set aside my personal opinions, assumptions and judgments in order to guard against distortion of data. The use of audio-taped interviews, note-taking and journals I kept throughout the study is one way of ensuring confirmability.

To address transferability, I described in detail the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research and showed all data as transparent as possible. I made sure that the data are rich with descriptions, so that the person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is. To establish the dependability of my study, I ensured consistency during the data collection and analysis by doing the code-recode system during data reduction and applied the peer examination and investigator triangulation of the data collected and analyzed. This made the study reliable.

Dependability is a criterion which is considered equivalent to reliability and similarly concerned with the stability of the results over time (Ramsey, 2010; Sinkovics et al, 2008). Moreover, Suter (2012) cited that *dependability* is improved by common qualitative strategies such as audit trails, rich documentation, triangulation and also by traditional methods such as inter-coder or inter-observer agreement and code-recode consistency using the same human instrument.

Ethical Consideration

Since my research study involved teachers and educators, they were hesitant to disclose information out of fear and with held some data. However, as part of research rigor, several safeguards were applied that erased their fears and promoted trust. I made sure that my study was guided by ethical principles as described by (Mack et al, 2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the participants' experiences, insights and concepts as well as generalizations emerging from the garnered information through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The following research question added to the realization of the data results from the informants.

Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of teachers Attending Trainings and Seminars Sponsored by DepEd.

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Instructional Skills Enhancement	Improved my knowledge on the subject matter
	Learned more teaching strategies and methodologies
	We learned new teaching techniques and approaches
	Gives a lot of new ideas related to work as teacher
	It enhances our way of facilitating learning.
	It introduces teaching innovations.
	Updates us on the latest trends in teaching
	Provides additional insights to my way of teaching
	Gives other options in teaching
	It helps improve the quality of my teaching.
Personal Growth	It's also a time for bonding with other teachers.
	It's a requirement for promotion.
	Makes me feel more confident
	Addresses the needs of teachers as persons and as professionals
Insufficient Support	Sometimes registration is expensive; we cannot afford
	Need to shoulder it first; for reimbursement later
	Sometimes we have to spend from our own pockets
	Financial constraints – cannot afford the registration, meals and allowance
	We spend our own money, we have no budget
	It is financed sometimes by Dep Ed; but usually charged to the participant

Discontent and Disillusionment	Sometimes the facilitators are not well-equipped.
	Not all trainings enhance my teaching skills
	Some seminars are just bird's eye view, not specific
	Some facilitators don't know how to engage the participants; are not convincing or capable.
	I get bored when facilitators just keep on talking; no interactive activities.
	Some participants are not focused – just tinkering with gadgets or goes window shopping.
	Facilitators do not know how to make the sessions lively and engaging; are not really knowledgeable

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on Consequences Expected Upon Completion of Professional Development Activities

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Appropriate Utilization	To apply in the classroom what I have learned
	That we will implement what we have learned from seminars
	Put it into action by using the new skills and intervention techniques
	To implement the new techniques and methods learned
	Apply it in my class right away
	It will be useless if not used in own school
	Use the resource material that is appropriate for the lesson
Propagation	To echo or spread the learning or ideas
	Share it to my school head and co-teachers
	Disseminate what we need to apply
	Share it with my fellow teachers
	Conduct echo seminars
	Re-echo the concept to those who had no chance to attend the trainings
Enhanced School	That National Achievement Test (NAT) results will improve
	Pupils' class performance will be better

Performance	Supervisors have to see something new during monitoring
	Improved pupil performance
Professional Advancement	Promotion to higher ranks
	Additional points to our Individual Performance Competency-Based for Teachers.
	It helps in promotion which could mean better income
	Progress in my career
	It will make my life better
	Additional stock knowledge
Compliance	Requirement for attendance is conformed
	I attend for attendance because it is required
	It is obligatory in the service, rarely voluntary

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, implications for practice and for future research. This was founded from the themes which emerged from data analysis. The purpose of this study has been stated to investigate the experiences of public school teachers as well as the meanings of trainings and seminars for them. Its intent is to elicit meaningful insights, concepts and viewpoints to be used as bases in the findings of this study. The results of this study have presented that public school teachers attend trainings and seminars for instructional skills enhancement which are useful in their profession.

Cheung and Cheng (1997) also indicated that teachers should be aware of the importance of developing themselves strategically in order to achieve their personal goals and school mission and be able to formulate their own professional development plan. In order to nurture high-quality teaching, support for ongoing professional learning in schools is essential for teachers. Thus, teacher development and leadership are key components for productive professional and career development programs (Moeini, 2008). Let us consider the case of Pam (pseudonym) she divulged that she was interested in trainings and seminars because she considered these activities important especially for her professional growth and development.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings of the study, it is significant for school heads and teachers to have a concerted effort to maximize the positive outputs of every training and seminar attended. This implies that school heads, leaders and teachers are responsible for their professional development through trainings and seminars which can be of great help to enhance and improve the quality of teaching and education provided to the students. With the growing importance of specialization globally, the need for well-trained

and highly skilled teachers is now being also felt beyond national and cultural boundaries, making the well-trained teacher an invaluable product in an institution. The term 'training' may bring up images of military drills, but in practice the training of teachers involves relatively sophisticated processes derived by theoretical models of professional development and change over time in teachers' conceptions of teaching (Black et al., 2004; 2011; Schon, 1987; Shulman, 2007).

In addition, the school heads and teachers may devise an evaluation method to further assess the significance and practical application of a training and seminar as required or sponsored by the Department of Education. For teachers, to write a checklist for expectations and applications of trainings and seminars if the learned skills and information had been disseminated and shared properly to colleagues or to students. For School Principals/heads, a consistent evaluation, assessment and re-assessment of teachers who attended trainings and seminars must be done regularly, monitoring if a particular training or seminar has an impact or result to the improvement of teaching strategies and for the improvement of the school community.

For DepEd officials, school heads and teachers after every training and seminar an evaluation sheet or report may be submitted to evaluate the lecturer, speaker and the seminar as a whole. This can help the DepEd officials in promoting helpful seminars which are timely and can meet the demands and needs of every teacher and school and at the same time, this process can help the Department's officials in eliminating unnecessary trainings which do not suit the individual needs of the teachers. Speakers in a training program are often eloquent about what they are trying to achieve and sophisticated about their training methods, even if they are not yet sophisticated about finding out whether they are successful. A framework for analyzing the goals and rationales of training programs from in-depth interviews with trainers has identified a range of training goals are utilized to measure if the training is capable of bringing about three goals: improvement of teachers' skills; development of teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning; and consequent advancement in students' learning (Gibbs and Coffey, 2000).

Implications for Future Research

This study is limited to public elementary school of Davao del Sur, the following future researches are recommended: The findings of this study are generalizable to 14 participants, future research may be done on private school teachers for comparative study or with another group to validate the findings of this study.

Second, future research may be conducted on public secondary school teachers in other parts of the country to add more to the experiences and insights of the teachers pertaining to trainings and seminars. Future research may also include college professors and instructors as regards to their viewpoints on professional development activities.

Third, future research may be conducted by interviewing again the participants if their insights and ideas have not changed over time.

Fourth, future research can consider the systematic assessment of the effects, significance and value of a training and seminar from which the teachers can actively voice out if a training and seminar has a deliberate impact in their profession.

Fifth, a research including the students' perceptions on their teacher's attendance in trainings and seminars may also be conducted particularly if training has to do with teaching method, classroom management and new teaching strategies. It is also important to measure the results of professional development trainings that are directed to the improvement of instructional skills among teachers.

The findings of this study were viewed from the insights of public elementary school teachers. Additional research may be conducted to find out the school heads' views and concepts on trainings and seminars to support the findings that this study supports.

Concluding Remarks

In the light of the findings of this study, I can say that public school teachers need trainings and seminars or professional development activities. These are necessary to equip them with new skills and pass on to them new information. Accordingly, aside from the trainings and learning experiences of a teacher, in his study Gourneau (2005) illustrated that teachers must also possess five attitudes to be an efficient and effective educator such as: demonstrating caring and kindness, sharing responsibility, sensitively accepting diversity, fostering individualized instruction and encouraging creativity. A teacher cannot be ultimately free from experiencing learning and development through trainings because these are vital for his or her growth both as a learner and as a teacher. Department of Education aims that every teacher will become effective catalyst of development, a lot of trainings and seminars are conducted nationwide to improve teachers' learning and skills to be then imparted to students and fellow teachers at school. Trainings and seminars on new methods and techniques in teachings, orientations on new curriculum, values formation seminars and the likes are being held in different parts of the country so as to prepare all the teachers in globalization. Their attendance to these seminars will create an effective learning environment, improve teaching-learning situations, keep updated on modern instructional devices and inspire them to become better teachers in the modern world. Since the Department is offering free trainings and seminars, teachers must grab these opportunities for self-improvement (Felipe, 2013).

From the findings of this study I have recognized that teachers need support from their school heads as well as from the Department itself. It is more meaningful for teachers to participate in trainings and seminars without the hassle of financial constraints and expensive registration. According to Frost (2007), training presents a prime opportunity to expand the knowledge base of all employees, but many employers find the development opportunities expensive. Aside from the evaluation of the teachers who attend trainings and seminars the lecturers and speakers must also be evaluated that is to invite them again for another trainings and activities if they are eloquent and well-equipped and to choose for another option if they are incompetent.

The contributions of this study depend on the willingness and availability of the public school teachers and from their concepts and insights on the meaning of trainings and seminars the results were consolidated. It coincides with the views of Guskey (1988) which was the basis for this research. These views assisted me to better understand the real meaning of trainings and seminars as perceived by public school teachers. Though there are many issues yet to be studied in this area, my study is just one of the researches on meanings of trainings and seminars for teachers.

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