

STORY OF TIN: NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO EXPERIENCES OF FIRST PHILIPPINE K-12 GRADUATE

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the K-12 Basic Education Program in the Philippines brought significant programs and projects to expand and improve the delivery of basic education in the country. It added two more years of senior high school in the basic education, broadening the goals of basic education to higher education preparation, middle level skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment. The present study used narrative inquiry to narrate the past experiences of Tin as one of the first graduates of this 7-year old educational reform. It examined Tin's journey from junior high school to senior high school to gain a better understanding of being a K-12 student in the Philippines and a deeper and richer insight on the implementation of the K-12 curriculum. A qualitative analysis of an in-depth interview with Tin highlighted her struggles, both in her junior and senior high schools. In particular, her struggles included some personal conflicts such as being academically competitive amidst being introvert and financially poor, adjustment to a new environment as she transferred from a rural school to an urban school, rigidity of her senior high school academic subjects, and her trouble with her teachers' teaching styles. The story of Tin provided specific insights as to how similar conditions as hers may be avoided and how the teaching-learning process may be improved, particularly in the light of the K-12 curriculum implementation in the Philippines.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, Philippine K-12 Basic Education Program, student experiences, Junior High School, Senior High School

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines has implemented K-12 Basic Education Program since the school year 2012-2013 by virtue of the Republic Act 1033 or the Enhanced Basic Education of 2013 (Official Gazette Congress of the Philippines, n.d.). Its implementation started with Grade 1 and Grade 7 learners, with succeeding levels being introduced after every school year. Several studies have been conducted on the Philippine K-12 curriculum implementation (Montebon, 2015; Cabansag, 2014; Mohammad, 2016; Combalicer, 2016; Acosta and Acosta, 2016; Rabacal and Alegato, 2017; Acar, 2017) however, none of these studies have thoroughly investigated and present actual experiences of a K-12 student in great detail. Moreover, these

studies did not provide holistic picture of student's K-12 experiences as most of them were conducted cross-sectionally at the time when no student graduated yet from K-12 curriculum. The present study uses narrative inquiry to narrate the past experiences of Tin as one of the first graduates of the Philippine K-12 educational reform. It examined Tin's journey from junior high school to senior high school in order to gain deeper and richer insights on the implementation of the K-12 curriculum and an understanding of being a K-12 student in the Philippines. Narrative inquiry as a research design involves the use of stories as data and as a means of understanding people's experiences. It tells the story of an individual unfolding in a chronology of his/her experiences, set within his/her personal, social, and historical context, and including the important themes in those lived



experiences (Creswell, 2013). Those who use this design argue that stories are the closest they can come to shared experience.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to investigate and detail the experiences of Tin as a student who underwent the many “firsts” in the implementation of the K-12 educational reform in the Philippines. Her story was expected to help people better understand how it felt or feels like being a K-12 student and provide feedback on the K-12 implementation in the Philippines. Furthermore, it was expected to yield insights on how teachers and/or school administrators may improve the teaching-learning process in the classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

The sole source of text for this study was the semi-structured in-depth interview with Tin conducted on November 2, 2019 at Tin’s house. Tin was informed about the interview and its purpose two weeks before its conduct. Four expert-validated interview protocols were prepared prior the interview, one for each major period, namely: pre K-12 years (elementary), junior high school, senior high school, and post K-12 years (college). During the interview, Tin answered several open-ended questions, particularly on her perceptions and experiences as a student in school. Follow-up questions were also asked to clarify some of her stories. The entire interview lasted for about four hours. The whole conversation was recorded through field notes and a mobile phone recorder. To analyze the data, the entire interview was carefully transcribed. After reading the transcription several times, different themes emerged. These themes were indexed with various highlighted colors and with notes in the margins. The themes were organized into diagrams to explore possible links among them. An initial story was then drafted from these organized themes and sent to Tin to ensure its accuracy and validity. Some

corrections from Tin were incorporated to create the final story.

RESULTS

1. Tin’s Junior High School Experiences

The junior high school experiences of Tin revolved around Tin’s being competitive as a student as influenced by different factors such as proving to herself her capabilities, her school-induced idea that “K12 education is advance,” high expectations from her teachers and classmates, and the quarterly and year-end ranking of students in their class. Although this developed trait led her to good academic performance that earned her greater self-confidence, it also brought her too much pressure on her studies, strong latent competition against her classmates, and unhealthy conflict with some of her teachers. These all happened against a background of various challenges to her, personally, financially, and academically. Her strong focus on her goals or studies, devotion to God, and being adaptive and reflective on her experiences enabled her to surmount all these struggles.

Academic Competitiveness

When Tin was in elementary, she described herself as an “average, non-competitive pupil who never gets selected to participate in contests.” Thus, when she entered high school, she decided to become “more active and involved” in school activities. In her Grade 7, and until she completed junior high school, she perceived K12 curriculum as “more advance” than the previous curriculum because of the lessons that they were studying. This idea made her feel that she had to adapt and be “competitive” in her studies.

For me, K12 is “advance” because when I was in Grade 7, we were already studying topics in fourth year high school [old curriculum] ... I knew that they were

expecting us to be good. That's why I felt that I had to be competitive.

Since Tin was able to establish a good academic start, she felt that her teachers and other schoolmates expect her to be always high-performing in all activities, which just fueled her being competitive in school. But above all these factors, it was the quarterly and year-end ranking of students that became the most prevailing driving force that stirred her to compete in school. Throughout her narrative, she always expressed how she strived to maintain her rank in the class. She also expressed the weight of joining in extracurricular activities just to be on the top. According to her, 70 percent of their rank came from their academic performance while 30 percent came from their extracurricular activities. This also became a factor that led her to run for Supreme Student Government (SSG) president of her school which negatively affected her studies. Tin's competitive attitudes towards her studies brought some positive and negative experiences to her. Since her Grade 7, she started feeling that some of her teachers disliked her because of her competitiveness in class. She grew worrisome for instances where her classmates could be more favored by their teachers because her classmates were close to them. On a positive note, Tin's competitive disposition in studies also benefited her. She ranked third in her class during Grade 7, first in her Grade 8, and second during her Grades 9 and 10. For her, these honors she received and the skills she acquired made her achieve her goal, which, in turn, boosted her self-confidence.

For me, my junior high school life was a success because I was able to show my skills. It also developed my self-confidence.

Background Struggles

The aforementioned circus of experiences anchored to her "competitiveness" was but set on the stage of some other challenges related to

her financial status, personality, lack of learning resources, and her teachers' teaching style. These struggles in the background further complicated her junior high school life. From the very start, Tin identified herself as an introvert person who found it difficult to socialize among her classmates and sometimes, "ask questions or clarify things in class." She attributed this personality to the poor financial status of her family. During her Grade 7, Tin stated that they had no learning modules and they only relied on their notes during class discussions. She also said that some of their modules had some errors as identified by their teachers. But more than these, she attributed her difficulty or failure in learning some of their topics to the teaching styles of their teachers. In her Grade 8 Mathematics class, she narrated how she would memorize solutions instead of familiarizing concepts or formulas. In her Grade 9 Science class, she mentioned how lack of organization of their topics confused her and her classmates. Moreover, she also expressed her dismay over her Grade 10 English class for overly relying on them as students and not teaching them the lessons in their modules. Nevertheless, Tin believed that the K-12 curriculum was a "good" curriculum. According to her, the problem was just in the way their teachers implemented it.

Coping Mechanism

Tin was able to overcome her struggles because of her strong focus on her goals. In her account of her Grade 7 experiences, she said:

I had overcome my struggles because I was not looking at them. Because I was a competitive person, I focus more on my studies rather than my personal struggles.

Her reinforced faith in God during her Grade 8 also aided her in coping with the stresses of her studies. According to her, writing devotions soothed her emotionally and helped her accomplish her tasks. Lastly, her being adaptive

to situations and being reflective of her experiences enabled her to withstand and successfully hurdled the challenges she faced in her junior high school. In her narratives, she showed many times how she would look back to her previous experiences and uses them as motivation to perform better next time. She also showed how she would adjust to hardships such as “eating plain rice only for lunch when she had no money for viand” and “walking towards school when no tricycle would pass by.” All these demonstrated her persistence and flexibility as a junior high school student.

2. Tin’s Senior High School Experiences

The senior high school experiences of Tin seemed to be a period of adjustments and struggles in her school and environment as she transferred from a rural junior high school to a state university in a highly urbanized area. Her experiences were further compounded by her “unchosen” senior high school strand. Moving up from a junior high school, Tin was filled with excitement and enthusiasm to enter senior high school. Tin initially thought that senior high school was easier compared to junior high school because it was supposed to teach them practical lessons needed for work.

At first, I was thinking that senior high school would be easier because it would be about enabling us to work. I thought that it was about capacitating us to find practical work in case that we would not proceed to college.

With the confidence Tin gained from her junior high school, she thought that she was ready to fare in “advance” schools. To her, the Senior High School which she was about to enter was already “familiar” to her as her siblings graduated college from that school. That school was also offering free tuition to senior high school as mandated by the government. However, she admitted that she was “empty and unaware” of the culture of the students and teachers in that

school. Tin’s Senior High School was offering different strands then, namely: Accounting, Business, and Management (ABM), Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL), and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The STEM strand was offered by different colleges and department: College of Sciences (CS), College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology (CEAT), and the College of Teacher Education Laboratory Senior High School (CTE-LSHS). Initially, she wanted to pursue Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand as it was aligned to her preferred college course, Education. However, this strand was not offered by her School, and upon the influence of her twin sister, she decided to take STEM strand instead. Unfortunately, the registrar “mistakenly enrolled” her in the “STEM-Engineering” offered by the CEAT, instead of her preferred “STEM-Sciences” offered by the CS. Tin’s decision to transfer to a state university and her wrong senior high school strand brought her “traumatic” struggles, especially during her Grade 11 First Semester. In her narrative, her senior high school struggles can be drawn from the changes or differences in four aspects, her environment, academic subjects, teachers, and family.

Struggles with the Environment

Especially during Grade 11, Tin seemed to experience “culture shock” in her school environment, particularly with her classmates. As she narrated, most of her classmates were “sons/daughters of engineers, or politicians; coming from private schools or science classes; wealthy; and intelligent.” She would compare herself to them and felt inferior to them. Tin even compared her experience to a “knife” as she came from a “poor” place and suddenly entered into an “unknown, unfriendly place, where everyone seemed to be filled with pride.” She also lamented how some of her teachers and classmates would humorously criticize her weird accent and the loudness of her voice. Her heavy schedule during her Grade 11 First Semester



also added to her difficulty in adjustment. According to Tin, her classes were scheduled Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 9:00 am to 8:30 pm, with a PE class every Wednesday. However, Tin shared that her environment gradually improved over the course of her senior high school. She said that the change in her schedule and set of teachers and classmates, and her eventual adaptation enhanced her condition.

Struggles with Academic Subjects

Tin had difficulty in learning some of their subjects, particularly those which were related to Mathematics. According to her, those subjects were too advanced for her and that she had no “strong foundations” in Mathematics when she was in the junior high school. This had made her feel “hopeless” in learning those subjects. The rigors of her Mathematics subjects even brought her anxiety.

Whenever I hear that we have a new topic in our Mathematics subjects, I feel hesitant to go to school. I was scared especially when there were surprise quizzes.

Tin also shared her effort to study and learn one of her subjects, Calculus, but still not able to answer questions because the questions in the test were asking for solutions different from what she studied. She also narrated the difficulty of lessons in her other subjects such as Philosophy, Earth Science, and English in different semesters. She mentioned that their scores were mostly low such as “3/30, 5/50 or even zero.”

Struggles with Teachers’ Teaching Style

Since Tin studied at a state university, all their teachers were non-education, college instructors. According to Tin, most of their teachers treated them like college students with very high expectations.

They had an overwhelming expectation about us. They expected us to be knowledgeable already about our topics because of the availability of library and internet.

Tin also narrated that they were not given specific subject outline, instead, a list of broad topic titles to be discussed for the whole semester. Thus, even if they did research on them, they did not know the specific topics to be included in their lessons. Another problem that Tin had was the difference in the difficulty or complexity of what their teachers discussed and what appeared on their tests. According to her, some of their tests were generally more complicated and asked for deeper understanding of the lessons, which was way beyond what she reviewed and understood from their discussions. Tin also shared how the attitudes of some of their teachers intimidated them and made them feel uncomfortable to approach their teachers. As examples, her Earth Science teacher was “easily offended and not easy to talk to” when they needed to take missed quizzes; her English Teacher would “shame their classmates while reporting because she did not like their report;” while her Filipino teacher sometimes would “frankly” reprimand their classmates during class discussions. According to Tin, the difficulty of their lessons combined with their teachers’ ineffective approach to make them learn led many of her classmates to “cheat” during exams. On the other hand, Tin recognized some of their teachers who had better teaching styles. She specifically identified her Filipino, Physics, and Chemistry teachers on her Grade 11 Second Semester. According to her, these teachers assess their capabilities and teach them accordingly. She also mentioned that they “love their students” and are “friendly” to them.

Lack of Comfort from Family

During her senior high school, Tin lived with her elder brother and sisters in the city, away from her father who used to prepare their needs

for school and serve as their confidant as well. Because of this, she missed the support of her father physically and emotionally.

Before, my father was always there for me. I could easily tell him my problems or my needs. During senior high school, aside from my twin, I felt that I had none.

Tin also had trouble adjusting in their boarding house as she narrated, "I was tired at school, then I became more tired at home." This was because of the differences in the way her siblings would treat her and the way her father would before. During her junior high school, her father would usually prepare her food and other needs, most especially during examination days. When Tin was in her Grade 11, she actually wanted to go back to her previous school. She desperately missed the comfort of her old home. More than emotional or psychological support, Tin also wished for somebody to help her in her academic difficulties.

Coping Mechanism

Tin attributed her survival of her senior high school struggles to her resilient personality. In her account of her Grade 11 struggles, she said:

I survived all those challenges because of my personality that no matter how difficult the situation is, I would just endure it.

Moreover, her faith in God also helped her withstand her ordeals. She said that through faith, her anxieties and fears became "lighter in her heart and mind."

3. Tin's Post K-12 Journey

Looking back at her senior high school life, Tin considered it as the most difficult phase of her education, even harder than her college. Her perception now is very different from how

she perceived senior high school at the start. In her interview, she shared:

When I was in Grade 10, I thought that my next two years would be easier. But it happened to be more difficult, even more difficult than my college experiences.

In spite of her struggles, Tin still takes pride in having surmounted her senior high school, not because of academic honors, but for simply graduating from it successfully without "surrendering or transferring to other schools." Currently, Tin is pursuing Bachelor of Elementary Education. She still pursued college despite the idea that "senior high school graduate can work already" because she wanted to pursue her dream to become a teacher and that she believed that senior high school education was "not enough to earn a living." Nevertheless, Tin affirmed that she could work already after senior high school. But she admitted that these jobs she could get were not necessarily STEM-related. She also shared that the strand in their senior high school "does not determine the kind of work they would land in" as it also "does not serve as basis for the course they could enroll in college."

DISCUSSION

Being the first batch of the K12 curriculum in the Philippines, Tin experienced the many "firsts" in its implementation. Her perceptions and experiences give a more detailed view of being a K12 student who underwent the seemingly "trial-and-error" stage of the said process. Understandably, this is a one case study and generalizations are inappropriate. However, the story of Tin can provide specific insights as to how the teaching-learning process may be improved, particularly in the light of the K12 implementation in the Philippines. The following are the key points which may be derived from her story.

1. *Ranking students in class creates competition among students.* Since the

implementation of the K-12 curriculum, DepEd has imposed the new guidelines for assessment and awards. However, as in the case of Tin's junior high school, ranking practices still take place. Thus, honor students are inevitably competing against each other causing pressure on their studies. It can be inferred then that teachers be cautious in imposing rigid ranking on their students using their General Weighted Averages (GWAs).

2. Understand students' backgrounds. Students who come to school have different backgrounds, personalities, struggles, and needs. Tin for example was a poor, introvert, and yet an eager-beaver learner. Being understanding of students' contexts will help teachers and administrators make decisions that will promote wholesome environment and learning experiences for students.

3. Teach students fundamental concepts. Tin had difficulties in her senior high school because of her weak foundations in some of her subjects in the junior high school. Teachers then should thoroughly instill in their students the "essentials" of a lesson before proceeding to the next.

4. Provide formative assessments to students to determine their learning level. During Tin's senior high school, most instructors assumed, without assessing, that students knew already the prerequisite concepts in their subjects. This in turn just led to Tin's struggles and failure to learn their lessons.

5. Align summative assessments to class discussions and lesson objectives. In teaching, lessons should be constructively aligned from objectives to assessment. Based on Tin's experience, many of the students failed in exams because their exams were usually more difficult or complicated than what was discussed with them. In this case, assessment then becomes "invalid" as it measures what it is not supposed

to measure, and worse, serves as basis in failing a student.

6. Provide a clear subject guide at the start of the semester/quarter. As in the case of Tin's senior high school, lack of clear subject guide made her unable to track their lessons in some subjects. She also found difficulty studying because she did not know exactly what was to be covered in each topic.

7. Teacher's teaching style influences student's learning. Tin shared that she understood better some of their subjects because of the way their teachers taught the lessons. Teacher's being "specific and organized" is what she thought to be helping her learn better.

8. Teacher's behaviors and attitudes affect student's motivation to learn. Tin perceived her friendly and understanding teachers were more effective in encouraging them to learn. Very strict and inconsiderate teachers send fear among them making them hesitant to participate in class.

9. SHS teachers should also be equipped with educational or pedagogical knowledge and skills. According to Tin, she observed that her education teachers were more effective in delivering lessons than her non-education teachers. This could be because education teachers took courses such as Child and Adolescent Development and Facilitating Learning.

10. Student's self-confidence matters. Tin moved up from junior high school with high confidence. But her senior high school experiences curtailed it down leaving her anxious and even scared to go to school. Teachers then should help students build their confidence. In Tin's own words: "*Building student's confidence is the best way for a student to learn, not through pressuring or imposing high standards on them.*"

11. *Not all students in a senior high school strand are really inclined to the strand, itself.* As in the case of Tin, there could be some students who just happened to be enrolled in their current strand. An awareness of this should make teachers assess the knowledge and skills of their students and provide them intervention, if necessary.

12. *Support of the family is important to student well-being.* During Tin's senior high school, some of her family members were not so mindful of what she was experiencing or struggling with. They could have asked her of her struggles and extended her some help. Indeed, family support and comfort do a big deal for a student like Tin.

13. *Care for students' mental health.* As evidenced by Tin's experiences, student tasks sometimes can adversely affect one's mental health leading to anxiety and depression. Parents and teachers should then be aware of student's mental health and help them have a sound one. The Psychological Association of the Philippines in 2013 actually recommended that teachers take courses related to guidance and counseling due to the dearth of guidance counselors in schools.

14. *The capability of senior high school students to work after graduation should be strengthened.* After graduating from senior high school, Tin was ready for work, but not necessarily for STEM-related work. She also noted that they were not informed of the possible specific work they could apply for after graduation. DepEd and the government then should intensify their efforts to ensure that the senior high school graduates in the future will be more work-ready for specific jobs. Also, those jobs should be made available for them.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated and detailed the experiences of Tin as one of the first K-12

graduates in the Philippines. Her story revealed the evolution of her beliefs, perceptions, and expectations about K-12 education over time. It highlighted her personal and academic struggles and her ways of overcoming them. It also offered significant insights on how teaching and learning may be improved particularly in the light of K-12 curriculum implementation. In the end, the story of Tin reminds educators that every student in the class has a story to tell and understanding each of their stories is a way of seeing things in their perspective and helping them to learn better. The story of Tin also reminds educators of the big role that teachers play in the success of K-12 curriculum implementation. As what Rob Rauh, Principal of Marva Collins Preparatory School, said as cited in Calderon (2014), "Every child is expected to succeed, and teachers will be held accountable for making it happen. Students don't fail, teachers do."

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