

Every Teacher is Special: Stories of Heroism

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Abstract Teachers are modern-day heroes contributing to the development of every child. This study primarily aimed to recognize and value the heroism of SPED teachers through real-life success stories of individuals with developmental delays who underwent the Community-based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP). The study followed a descriptive research design that targeted five participants who were purposively selected by two of their retired SPED teachers in an elementary school in Legazpi City Division SPED Center. Interviews were conducted to gather the needed data and a documentary film was crafted to preserve the veracity of the collected information. Findings revealed that the teachers contribute a great part to the achievement of the five participants. Results also showed the struggles SPED teachers have encountered during their community days and how they were able to deal with them. Using cross-case analysis the study emphasized that every teacher's story is a story of heroism. The study recommends documentation of teachers' stories in every field which may serve as inspiration to everyone.

Keywords: *Community-based Early Intervention Program, developmental delays, heroism, SPED Teacher*

Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Together with UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women and UNHCR, UNESCO provides guidance to communities and advocates a non-discriminatory education across borders, regardless of ethnicity, age, and gender (SDG 4 Data Digest: National SDG 4 Benchmarks: Fulfilling Our Neglected Commitment, 2021). It ensures an inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all learners regardless of age, gender, and disability. In particular, the SDG 4 emphasizes that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (UNESCO, 2016).

Recognizing the important role of education, the Philippines through the Department of Education (DepEd) envisioned its goal to fully reach out to the schools in the country through quality early years of education among the learners. By early years, it sought to address the individual needs of learners in the various domains of development to: 1) identify possible developmental delays or disabilities, 2) prevent disabilities from becoming worse or developing secondary disabilities, 3) provide the proper and appropriate intervention, and 4) make sure that the family is aware of their condition.

Apparently, the country claims that its population is its most valuable resource, particularly the children who significantly contribute if the government has maximized their full potential. In doing so, the country recognizes the importance of starting early, thus joining the global

community in promoting quality Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) or the Republic Act 8980. This republic act serves as the blueprint for the country's program for children ages zero to six. The policy upholds to support the rights of children to survival, development, protection, and participation with facilitated education at home, in community or through school - based setting and eventually into primary schooling.

With the passage of Republic Act No. 10410, Early Years Act (EYA) of 2013, DepEd is mandated to support the national ECCD program recognizing the ages zero to eight as the first crucial stage of educational development. The aforementioned policy stresses the need to strengthen the physical-motor, socio-emotional, cognitive, language, psychological and spiritual development of young children that may be provided in a center-based setting or home-based learning environment.

Recently, RA 11650 or an act instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education, establishing inclusive learning resource centers of learners with disabilities in all school districts, municipalities, and cities, providing for standards, appropriating funds therefor, and for other purposes was signed and is being enacted in schools across the country. This policy gives access to schools to accept children in the early intervention program.

Aligned with the Home-Based Instruction Program for Children with Mental Retardation in the 1970s which was initiated by the Philippine Association for the Retarded (PAR), the Community-Based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP) aims to provide a continuous program of instruction in school and at home for a more effective management of the handicap condition.

Relatedly, a SPED center established in Legaspi City (Rawis Elementary School Community-Based Early Intervention Program) was created to accommodate the growing number of children with disabilities who require special care and rehabilitation in poor barangays. This phenomenon necessitated the conceptualization of a scheme where the maximum number of beneficiaries can be reached out with minimal resources. This scheme was initiated to address the lack of transportation (due to the economic situation of families) to bring their children, who require special therapeutic care, for a normal check-up. It becomes doubly agonizing when they cannot be served in health centers available in their locality due to the number of patients being served or the lack of special services and facilities needed.

Hence, the aid of special education (SPED) teachers trained to handle children in a community-based setting is vital to implement the program. The effort contributed by a SPED teacher outside the four walls of learning to maximize the child to his full potential is greatly doubled in the aforementioned situations to achieve readiness and skills mastery during the child's crucial years (Alexander, 2015).

The SPED teachers, therefore, play a critical role in furthering all aspects of the inclusive education process as nurturers (Byrd & Alexander, 2020). They have the power to influence the lives of children with special educational needs through their attitudes, beliefs, and skills that play a key role in creating a life-changing impact especially during their formative years of development. To varying degrees, they are wellsprings of knowledge and experience. Such bearing deems these SPED teachers as one of the modern-day heroes of today's generation.

However, not all who want to be a teacher can become a teacher. According to the journal article of

Goldstein (2015), although some have always wanted to be a teacher and others felt a call later in life (Goldstein, 2005), the profession needs intrinsic inspiration and motivation to be successful in the field. In the study, the teachers were hailed as heroes because they inspired their pupils and motivated them to overcome their own impairments and live a normal and successful life.

Wright (2012) in his study has defined teachers as heroes and noted that first, the teacher recognizes what is wrong and what must change. Secondly, the hero risks all to make the change happen, standing against those who benefit from the status quo. Finally, the hero never gives up.

The definition given by Wright (2012) supported the study in narrating the life experiences of these two SPED teachers who have gradually become the heroes of the five participants who shared their experiences with them. This study recognized that teachers through the struggles and bearings of the SPED teachers are one of the modern-day heroes. The outcome of this study is highly significant to the educational system as it will provide awareness that teachers, aside from the four corners of the classroom, also exert great effort in reaching out to the children and their families in the communities through the CBEIP.

The realizations of the study draw the value of appreciation among families and students as they become well-acquainted of the teachers' sacrifices and challenges to provide children with education. The welfare recollected from the five participants, identified to have developmental delays during their early years who are now living according to their successful professions, is that giving adequate assistance at an early age assisted in the formation of their developmental abilities required for their growth progress. In the same way, it enlightened the school community that the CBEIP is an effective approach that can help strengthen the relationship

between the school and the community, and promote the welfare of SPED teachers.

Framework of the Study

The study on the heroism of SPED teachers through the success stories of their students who had developmental delays is anchored on behaviorism, constructivism, cognitivism, motivational learning theory (Odom, 2016), and the dualistic model of passion.

Behaviorism (Strain et al., 1992) assumes that a learner is essentially inert when responding to various environmental stimuli, like a clean, blank slate (*tabula rasa*) (Tierney & Nelson, 2009) where behavior is shaped either through positive reinforcement or negative reinforcement. In this study, it believes that a SPED teacher plays an important role in providing reinforcement and filling the gap needed by the child. The reinforcement provided by the SPED teacher is a critical component in determining the child's behavior. Considering that the child is in his/her formative years of development, the SPED teacher should and must give necessary reinforcements to motivate the child in performing the task asked of him/her. Such reinforcements include praises (i.e., saying good work, excellent job, well done), simple gestures (e.g., a high five, tap on the shoulder), and rewards (e.g., token and reward system).

Constructivists envisioned a child-centered learning environment where the children can build their own experiences with the teachers as their guide and support system. Hence, constructivism believes that teachers should provide activities that will initiate the child-learning experiences. The study intended to show that a child needs the aid of a teacher who will guide him/her along the process. This means that the role of the teacher is to allow experiences

that will promote learning (Palmer, 2006). Cognitivists, on the other hand, argued that the way an individual thinks influence his/her behavior.

Cognitivists believe that the teachers' role is to provide age-appropriate learning activities that could promote development. For example, Piaget likened a child to a scientist who seeks answers from the world around him/her to construct his/her knowledge from experiences. In this study, a child is viewed as an active learner who builds his/her understanding of the world and its various occurrences. Hence, the role of the SPED teacher is to provide age-appropriate activities which could promote learning. The final theory, motivational learning theory posits that students and teachers alike need to be motivated and be influenced to perform effectively and productively.

When they are provided with love and support from family and friends, they feel more assured and secured making them more efficient towards a certain goal. Dualistic model of passion suggests that the passion of teachers towards teaching children contributes a huge factor in the success stories of their students. Their passion stems from internal and external factors. Internal factors include their love, desire, and compassion towards the children. External factors include the love and support they get from family, colleagues, friends, and the community. These theories consequently led the researcher to theorize that the success stories of the students are living proofs of the teacher's act of heroism.

Purposes of the Research

The study recognized and valued the heroism of SPED teachers through the success stories of children with developmental delays under the Community-based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP) of Rawis Elementary School

(Legazpi City Division SPED Center). Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Describe the development of individuals with special needs who underwent the Community-Based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP) and the roles played by their Special Education (SPED) teachers.
2. Evaluate how the students' life experiences inspired their SPED teachers to be modern-day heroes in the making.
3. Develop a short documentary film about the heroism of SPED teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

The research utilized the multi-case study design to strengthen the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon. Multiple-case design is a research methodology in which several instrumental, bounded cases are examined using multiple data collection methods. This research methodology is more powerful than single-case designs as it provides more extensive descriptions and explanations of the phenomenon or issue. (Gall et al., 2003). For validity and reliability, the participants' stories were noted down and recorded electronically via the video recorder of the mobile phone. The researcher was able to organize facts of events that occurred over a nearly 25-year period to obtain the necessities that emphasize the sacrifices of SPED teachers who now have triumphed among their students.

Participants

The participants of the study are the five students who were enrolled at the Legazpi City Division SPED Center identified and assessed to have developmental delays in three of the five developmental domains when they were three or four years of age, and the two retired SPED teachers. The students were listed under the CBEIP with a SPED teacher assigned in their residential areas identified to be Pigcale, Legazpi City and Bagumbayan, Daraga. They were purposively selected according to the initial interview conducted with their former SPED teachers. At present, their ages range from 24 - 29 and are now professionals – two of which are teachers, a manager, a map data processor, and a coastguard. The parents of these students also served as respondents of this study who helped explicitly identify the children’s experiences during the CBEIP. Data were sourced from the parents by conducting direct interviews to elicit needed information.

Table 1.

Student’s Profile

Case	Sex	Birthday	Age		Address	First Name of SPED Teacher during Intervention
			During Intervention	Present		
A	F	June 25, 1995	3 y/o	24 y/o	Pigcale, Legazpi City	Teacher Miña
B	M	May 26, 1995	4 y/o	24 y/o	Pigcale, Legazpi City	Teacher Miña
C	M	January 1, 1991	3 y/o	28 y/o	Bagumbayan, Daraga	Teacher Rose
D	M	May 22, 1992	4 y/o	27 y/o	Bagumbayan, Daraga	Teacher Rose
E	F	August 2, 1990	4 y/o	29 y/o	Bagumbayan, Daraga	Teacher Rose

The researcher sought ethical approval and permission from the participants prior to the conduct of the study. The form included information on the purpose, procedures, and utilization of their recorded interviews. The students were then coded Case A, Case B, Case C, Case D, and Case E to protect their identity and to assure the confidentiality of the given information. The same system was employed to the two teachers, indicated as Teacher Miña and Teacher Rose. Table 1 shows the profile of the students.

Instruments

This study utilized an interviewing method with Bikol (mother tongue in Bicol Region) as the means of communication to elicit authentic and acquitted responses. Taking down notes was done during the interview proper and at the same time, interviews were recorded electronically using a voice recorder application via the mobile phone for accuracy and reliability. Interview questions included: (1) the personal information of the interviewee, and (2) the guide questions during the interview proper. Follow up questions were also queried during the process.

In assessing the development of the child, a portage checklist (Portage, 2022) was used to guide the SPED teacher in determining the area of delay and the age the child is currently in. The checklist consists of five developmental domains namely cognitive, communication, motor, self-help, and socialization. Failure in three of these domains according to their age means that a child is entailed to be enrolled in the CBEIP.

A documentary film was made in Victory Village, Legazpi City, one of the areas of the Community-Based Early Intervention Program, with the efforts of two retired SPED instructors who had mentored in a CBEIP and their pupils

are now professionals, to regard the reality of the CBEIP. Below are sample of the interview questions used during the interview:

INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

(Para sa mga Magurang) [For Parents]

1. *Pwede po makikumpleto kan mga impormasyon na ini ukon sa aki nindo na nagklase kay Teacher Miña/ Teacher Rose: (Please complete the needed data below of your child under Teacher Miña/ Teacher Rose.)*
Pangaran (Name)
Kapangakian (Birthday)
Edad (Age)
Istaran (Address)
2. *Paano po nakalaog si aki niyo sa programa kang Community – Based Early Intervention Program? O sisay po ang nagturo saindo na may arog kaining klaseng programa? (How did you know about the Community-Based Early Intervention Program? Who introduced you to this program of the school?)*
3. *Nata po nindo pinalaog ang aki nindo sa programang ini? (Why did you decide to let your child be enrolled in the program?)*
4. *Pwede niyo po makwento ang nagin eksperyensa nindo kan naglaog kamu sa programang ini? Ano po ang masasabi nindo sa aki nindo bago maglaog sa programa asin kan natapos niya na ang programa? (Can you share your experience about the program? What can you say about your child before and after being enrolled in the program?)*
5. *Kumusta man po ang Teacher kan aki nindo habang nasa Community – Based Early Intervention Program? (How was the teacher of your child during the Community-Based Early Intervention Program?)*

Data Collection

The researcher conducted an orientation to the participants where she discussed the rationale of the study, sought participants' consent, and assured them that their responses would only be seen by the researcher.

Case Study

To identify the list of students with developmental delays who underwent the CBEIP from 25 years ago, the researcher sought the help of two retired SPED teachers, Teacher Miña and Teacher Rose (names are pseudonyms), who have taught in the community-based setting in Pigcale, Legazpi City and Bagumbayan, Daraga respectively. Through the gathered information, the researcher went to Pigcale, Legazpi City and Bagumbayan, Daraga to look for the identified names. Two names of students were identified in Pigcale, Legazpi City and three students from Bagumbayan, Daraga which formed participants for this study.

The researcher introduced herself to the family of the students, referred to by their previous teachers from the CBEIP of Rawis Elementary School (Legazpi City Division SPED Center), and stated the purpose of her coming. The researcher explicated that an interview will be conducted among them (such interview will include the parents and the student himself/ herself). In doing so, the researcher asked permission from the family that the information will be recorded via voice recorder for accuracy and precision of results. The researcher assured the participants that the recorded information will be used only for the construction of the case study. The family agreed with the condition and proceeded with the interview. While recording the conversation, the researcher also took down notes on important statements for consistency purposes.

Documentary Film

To develop the documentary film, the researcher first gathered film content by conducting an interview with two mentors of the program: Teacher Miña and Teacher Rose. The interview took place in their household where they shared their experiences during the time when they were doing community service in Pigcale, Legazpi City and Bagumbayan, Daraga respectively. The researcher explained that to gather accurate information, the interview will be recorded via voice recorder.

Aside from recording the conversation, the researcher also took down notes during the interview with the two teachers. The researcher constructed a storyline based on their responses and sought technical advice from experts in directing a documentary film. The content included the struggles they have encountered during the times they were teaching in their assigned places as well as how they were able to overcome each struggle.

The researcher also invited two of their students during the interview proper to elicit responses regarding their experiences during their community days. The filming took place in Victory Village, Legazpi City, at the latter stages of the Community-Based Early Intervention Program, for the safety of the participants and accessibility to the two retired SPED teachers, given their age and physical abilities. Final editing of the film was done by expert technical personnel.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the following modes of data analysis: Cross-case analysis, archival, and documentary data analyses. The cross-case analysis is a data analysis that examines themes, similarities, and differences across cases. Specifically, cross-case analysis was used to assess the gathered information from the five case studies of children with developmental delays

who underwent the CBEIP, and the roles played by the SPED teacher in each case establishing an organized construction of the similarities and differences among the five cases as well as the two SPED teachers. Archival data analysis was used to analyze the data culled from existing records. It was used to gather facts that happened from 1994. Such data from the documents were used in creating a documentary film which can recognize the efforts done by SPED teachers in a community- based instruction. In this way, the information gathered from the two SPED teachers will be preserved for future purposes. Document data analysis is a type of qualitative research in which documents are reviewed by the analyst to assess an appraisal theme. Through document data analysis, the researcher was able to collect and evaluate the needed data which occurred over a long period of time.

Results

The research yielded the following results:

Development of individual with Special Needs who underwent the Community – Based Early Intervention Program and the Roles played by their Special Education teachers

In the study of Watson and Tully (2008), home visitation from teachers and parents' role play significant roles in the development of the child. Such collaboration from the two key factors in the development of each child is important in addressing their individual needs in the domains of socialization, communication, and motor.

Moreover, the development of individual with special needs includes the following strategies implemented by the SPED teacher: play instruction, exposure to different activities, conversational and reading exercises, and musical

approach which resulted to the achievement of each learner becoming professionals: teachers, supervisors, map data processor, and coastguard.

Table 2.

Responses from the Parents

	Case				
	A	B	C	D	E
Referral (How did the family know about the program?)	Barangay	Barangay	Barangay	Barangay Kagawad Lita	Lourdes
Assessment (Delay in Reaching a Developmental Milestone)	Socialization	Socialization	Motor	Communication	Socialization
Strategy used by the SPED Teacher	Play instruction Exposure to different activities	Play instruction	Play instruction	Conversational and reading exercises	Play instruction Musical approach
Achievement	Teacher	Supervisor at SM Cabalen (Legazpi City)	Map data processor	Coastguard	Teacher

Short Documentary Film on the Heroism of SPED Teachers

Teachers face different challenges every year in their teaching career. But because of their love for their students, they were able to overcome these life struggles.

In the same way, Teacher Miña and Teacher Rose, two veteran SPED teachers identified their personal struggles as: children’s behaviors, stubborn and resistant parents, poor situation of the family like having no food at all and dilapidated house for learning, and unsafe environment causing one of the teacher’s lives to be threatened. Despite the struggles each teacher has encountered, the following

were their ways that helped them surpass the challenges: support from their family, support from some of the parents in the community, support and guidance from God, and the value of humility.

Table 3.

Experiences of SPED teachers during the Community-Based Early Intervention Program

	SPED Teacher	
	Teacher Miña	Teacher Rose
Years in Service	14 years	22 years
Assigned Places Taught	Pigcale, Legazpi City	Bagumbayan, Daraga Bitano, Legazpi City
Struggles	Children in their most tantrum behaviors Stubborn parents	Resistant parents Family has no food delapidated house Life being in danger
How they overcame these struggles	Support from the family Support from some parents in the community	Prayer and guidance from God Support from the family Humility

Discussion

Development of individual with Special Needs who underwent the Community – Based Early Intervention Program and the Roles played by their Special Education Teachers

The different results from each child show that learning starts at an early age in which each stage of development corresponds to certain skills that are age – appropriate. But due to some inherent and environmental factors, a delay in a specific developmental domain happens, affecting the growth process of the child. Such implies the need for intervention where teachers together with members of the family play a vital roles in the child’s developmental milestones. Singer et al. (2013) in their study, found that the continuous proximity of the teacher had the greatest impact on the level of play engagement. In the same way, teachers mainly contribute a large portion to this development as these teachers help in bringing progress one step at a time through the different strategies intended for each student’s individual needs.

As a result of the assessment on the five developmental delays, the SPED teachers at the school resorted to the Community–Based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP). The study relates the experiences of the child and the family on how the CBEIP has helped them, through the guidance of the SPED teacher. It reminisces the memories of the two retired SPED teachers who have taught these five individuals in this case study to achieve their dreams. Smythe et al. (2021) concluded that providing early intervention programs at an early age helps in the development of the child, supporting children with disabilities to thrive during their early years is important, as this period is critical for maximizing their development.

As said by SPED teachers: *Dipisil pero maogma ang pagturo sa mga arong. Mahirap pero masaya ang magturo sa mga bahay.* (It is a satisfying and a successful feeling upon learning how your students were able to achieve success because of providing early intervention). *Dai ko unaon na si Student A maestra na ngunyan. Masupgunon iyan dati, pero ngunyan maestra na. Maogmahon ako ta naging parte ako kan pagiging maestra niya.* (I never imagined that Student A was now a teacher. That the child used to be very shy, but now she is a full-fledged teacher. I am so happy because I was a part of his success as a teacher.) Supported by the study of Smith (2014) that early intervention programs create a long-term impact on the child, the following cases have been a long process as it follows their development from the time of their intervention at the early age to the time that they have improved much of themselves through their current professions. This means that high priority should be given to the improvement of early childhood education quality.

Wanjiku et al. (2016) in their studies concluded that there is a significant relationship between teachers' instructional practices and preschool learning. The teaching strategies inspire learners to participate effectively in preschool learning. Teacher Miña and Teacher Rose, to address the delays identified in each of their students, used various forms of teaching and learning strategies. Upon the assessment process of identifying their individual needs, the two SPED teachers recognized different activities according to the interests and strengths of each child to which yielded successful professionals as seen in Table 2.

Short Documentary Film about the Heroism of SPED Teachers

Teachers are not only confined within the four walls of the learning classroom, but outside of it as well. As Grattan (2017) mentioned in her study, an itinerant teacher takes on many

roles and responsibilities. SPED teachers are also referred to as itinerant teachers who travel within the community. Their primary role is to provide early intervention programs to children ages three to four to maximize their full potentials on becoming independent individuals in society.

In one unit of the study entitled “Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan: The Miracle and the Teacher,” Annie Sullivan visits Helen Keller at home to teach her the basic needs on how to become independent. She is deemed as Helen Keller’s own hero. In the same way, the SPED teachers in this documentary film are considered as heroes because of their love and passion for reaching out to the children with developmental delays in the community.

Saiden et al. (2020) explains that teachers have overcome their challenges, have undergone the cycle of life, have experienced different struggles and encounters in their field but still find a way to conquer every struggle. The study suggested that their physical and mental readiness, mentor system and staff development training should be strengthened to overcome challenges as a teacher. The occurrence of these in their cycle of life is what makes them heroes of today’s generation. Their attitudes of love, passion, and compassion towards life-long learning are what make them the Superman and the Wonder woman of every student.

Implications of the Study

Developmental delays in one or more of the developmental domains can be observed as early as three years old. Early identification of delays means that an early intervention should be given to properly and appropriately address the needs of these special children. To achieve such, SPED teachers can lead the way to provide the necessary intervention in the form of different strategies and techniques intended for the child. However, along the process, teachers will experience

challenges that may greatly affect and impact the progress. In the adversities of such, they need help from external factors which includes the collaboration with the parents and support from the community.

Conclusion

The study recognized and valued the heroism of SPED teachers through the success stories of children with developmental delays under the Community-based Early Intervention Program (CBEIP) of Rawis Elementary School (Legazpi City Division SPED Center). The study revealed the challenges of SPED teachers in a CBEIP which include: the behavior of the children as well as their family, and the condition of the environment. The mentioned problems are also accompanied by examples of how they overcame them, such as support from family and community, divine guidance, and, most importantly, their determination and love to help children with developmental delays.

Early childhood is the most crucial stage for the development of the child. Developmental milestones are particular in each age to help identify the child's development. These developmental milestones are important and necessary for the child's growth and development. Their growth and development are affected by various factors, and one of which is the kind of environment they belong to. The physical environment affects their cognitive, motor, socialization, self-help, and communication skills.

As stated in the Republic Act 11650, early intervention programs should be given emphasis in special education. Thus, a call for SPED teachers is needed to address such issues. SPED teachers who are trained enough to conduct community-based sessions where the child is exposed to his/her familiar nature. This is helpful in the conduct of utilizing

the different strategies where they can use the environment as the resource itself in performing activities that will maximize each child's potential to become independent in the society.

It is hoped that the Department of Education will see the importance of the early intervention program in a community-based approach. As supported by constructivism theory where a child gets to construct and build his/her own experiences in the most natural setting through the guidance from teachers. The Department of Education should see the vitality in the learners as well as the SPED teachers' struggles in reaching out to children at a young age.

The study can be augmented by future researchers by exploring more case studies of the community-based early intervention program, especially the opportunities of the children towards growth and development and the experiences of the SPED teachers in their journey to heroism.



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