

DISCOVERING THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER

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ABSTRACT

School administrators have often cited that beginning teachers graduating from the Institution of Higher Learning do not have the effective communication skills, higher order thinking skills, able to solve real-life problems and appreciate the art of teaching as comprehensive as those trained in teacher training colleges. In this paper, I will be looking at the generation, dissemination and communication of teaching knowledge in a university-school collaboration in a program known as School Based Teaching program (SBT) as a fulcrum in enhancing the scholarship teaching. I have conducted a case-based (Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987) study on the change in teaching knowledge of TESL (Teaching of English as A Second Language) undergraduates who had undergone three months School Based Teaching program (SBT). In the selected case study conducted on my TESL undergraduates, the professional growth of knowledge, teaching practice, attitudes, confidence, teamwork, and collegiality confirm to the need in equipping them with required macro and soft skills. Qualitative analyses revealed the presence of 19 themes: Caring; Communication; Creative; Fairness; Flexible; Friendly; Knowledgeable; Manages Classroom; Involving; Motivating; Organized; Passion for Teaching; Patience; Builds Relationships; Shows others respect; Challenges; Teaches Well; Good Personality; and Understanding. In addition, I will discuss the pedagogical issues arising from enacting change in scholarship of teaching beyond the ivory tower (i.e. Universities, via School Based Teaching program (SBT)).

Keywords: case-based, School-based Teaching program, teacher training

Introduction

The university as an ivory tower had not failed to fulfill the aspirations of schools especially those related to the attainment of the soft skills, such as communication skills, social skills, thinking skills and so on. We have witnessed a monumental growth of knowledge within but, of more relevance and possibly much more importantly, outside of the university. However, the process in higher education (HE) institution must have link and match with the needs of schools. Besides transferring knowledge to enhance the students' competence, HE institutions have been trying to equip students with skills such as teaching skills, technical skills, and soft skills. These skills should be designed to be involved into the curriculum. In the case of English Language teaching, the knowledge of Teaching of English as A Second Language (TESL) is explicitly transferred through subjects or courses, while skills often do not refer to one specific subject or course, instead, being integrated into any subject and developed within the mechanism of the learning process. Teaching skills which refer to behavioral job skill training or refer to theories, techniques, and behavioral guidelines, if applied properly, will enhance TESL's practice for example the ability to work in a team, for a problem solving, decision making, face a conflict etc. (Evers et al, 1998). Technical skills are skills used to represent the ability to accomplish a certain task, for example preparing a teaching portfolio properly. While soft skills refers to wider area that are often not easy to make a strong border with teaching skills, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, innovation and creativity, language skills, and assertive skills (Gandhi, 2008).

The institutions should be aware of the needs for the students to get and enhance the skills in teaching so that they are successfully groomed as effective TESL teachers. One program that bridges the gap between HE institutions and the school as the recruiter or graduates-user is sending students to have some real teaching experience. Usually, the students get this experience during their practicum programme, which normally occur in their last semester/year of study. However, practicum will not suffice to be an effective tool as the focus will be more on evaluation aspects rather than training (as in UMS case). Therefore, school based teaching as an outside learning program to teach experience before Practicum program becomes a very viable medium to close the gap. The benefit for the students is that they gain valuable experience in the school instead of the usual micro-teaching

session or mock teaching session conducted in the university as a traditional tool in enhancing the teaching skills of the students. This helps them make decisions about their teaching practice strategies and can provide an advantage when they begin their actual teaching practice before graduation.

Students who had undergone the experience will have a good experience with the school and the opportunity to employ various techniques and strategies learnt. It is also a way for the school and university to evaluate the student's abilities that fit within the school system. In addition, practicum student can be an invaluable asset to the school. In one hand, if the school evaluates the students' ability for the fitness, the HE institution, in other hand, also evaluate the success of the practicum program. Whether the practicum students have shown good performance takes into consideration the sustainability of the relationship between the HE institution and the school, as well as for the effectiveness of the curriculum and preparation program for the practicum.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was two folds: (a) To examine the characteristics that student teachers perceive as being indicative of an effective classroom teacher at the high school level; and (b) To determine the effect of learning teams on identified characteristics of effective high school student teachers.

Research questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceived characteristics of effective high school TESL student teachers?
2. What is the effect of learning teams on identified characteristics of effective high school TESL student teachers?

Method

Each team comprising of 3 - 5 student teachers was required to establish a Professional Learning Team for ELT. Teams were made up of all Final year student teachers and the lecturers. The requirements of professional learning teams in the project were few, but nevertheless demanding. These were:

attendance at all 15 periods designated teaching hours at SMK Bandaraya, Menggatal, Sabah; for the duration of 3 weeks, doing observation on fellow team members, writing personal teaching reflection, participation in regular team meetings (weekly or fortnightly in some cases) to discuss current English Language Teaching issues at the school; and to consider issues in lesson planning raised as a case study project. In addition, participants responded to the question of "Now, please list three to six characteristics that you think make teachers effective teachers". Specifically, the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) served as the qualitative data analysis technique that was used. This process involved reading and rereading all participants' written responses.

Result and Discussion

Case-based methods are common method used in teacher education to reveal the particular classroom practice. They are situated and specific to the context and include the vents, time and space. Cases tend to include the theories or principles, dramatic tension, rich description of the complexities of teachers' work, and the resolved. Johnson (2002) illustrated how teacher conceptualize, construct an explanation for, and resolve a problem in the instructional context under her master's TESOL program by using the case format follows: The Context, The Problem, Case-Based Discussion, and The Solution; which will be adopted in the discussion of the result this study.

The Context

As a TESL lecturer in SPPS for two ELT methodology courses (TT44412 - Teaching of English Language and TT4423 - Teaching of English Literature), I believe that improvements in student teachers' learning would be directly connected to the professional growth of student teachers. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of a question which has underpinned a research and development programmes focusing on English Language teachers' professional growth. This initial inquiry focused particularly on the understanding of professional growth among student teachers within the context of the English Language Teaching (ELT). The influences of culture, subject knowledge and pedagogy on the development of classroom practice were identified. As a result, a detailed school based

teaching practice program for professional development was designed to promote "student teacher growth" and such growth was viewed as teacher professional growth through a learning process.

The Problem

This project too, is designed to prepare student teachers to actual teaching prior to their teaching practice. The courses offered under the School of Education and Social Development though sufficiently covered the various aspects of micro and macro teaching skills, yet still lack in professional development component. In the project, all participants were considered part of a team. As all of them were teachers prior to their admission to this program, they brought the wisdom of practice and knowledge of their teaching experience. I promoted the idea that we were all researching ways to improve English Language learning together. There was an emphasis on the exchange of ideas with the intention of putting research into practice and classroom-testing research findings. Under this umbrella of professional development, student teachers' learning teams were formed.

Case-Based Discussion

Each learning team was unique in terms of team members, size and operation. Some teams met on a daily basis, others met less frequently. Some conducted formal, planned meetings, others conducted informal meetings, some a combination of the two. They completed similar teaching tasks at the school, for example the observation task, the assessment, the teaching, etc. They confronted similar issues, such as how to plan appropriate activities for their students' learning in light of the students' current needs. There were highs and lows in terms of energy and enthusiasm. These were in part due to the ongoing demands and constraints in teaching in a non-scheduled time in a secondary school (they were asked to teach in the weak students in the afternoon), and in part created by the subject academic requirements, in particular the project development commitments and lectures (they are in the midst of their final semester and they still have to attend their lectures for other subjects).

"Personally, we feel that the duration for the school-based project should be extended to more than three weeks. Though

we were only given three weeks to conduct this project, we still managed to teach all fifteen lessons as planned. This is our group's personal victory. But we are not satisfied with the students' attendance to the classes. As mentioned earlier on that most of the students were either involved with the sports practice or other extra curriculum activities. Therefore most of the group work activities were affected but we still managed to conduct them with the remaining few students. We would like to offer some suggestions to enhance better achievement of the school-based project in the future. We feel that the duration of the project should be longer, at least a month" (T2/cs/para4).

Early in the project, they were enthusiastic, yet somewhat overwhelmed by the requirements of project participation. Many of them were looking for "answers" or "instructions" to follow when teaching English Language and English Literature. Student diagnostic test at this early stage provided an understanding of students' performance that was both exciting and daunting for teachers. Their leaders were concentrating on teamwork and equipment management issues.

By mid-project period, the teaching and learning of ELT had become the professional learning teams' focus of discussion and analysis. They began to disclose their ideas and approaches. It became evident in the reflections that disclosed a collection of individuals with different teaching approaches. At the time, this was an uncomfortable notion for many teams. The learning teams appreciated the impetus of the project in preparing them for the real experience. They left the project being invigorated or enthused after the project and increasing their sharing of ideas, experimenting with their practice and incorporating new techniques. Several teams reported having difficulties as a result of a member who was not enthusiastic about the project. These issues were discussed regularly at coordinator meetings, with sharing of useful strategies.

By the end of the project, many learning teams had come to terms with the issue of professional differences. They were functioning as collegial units with lively professional discourse as portrayed during their project presentation. Differences in teaching were accepted, but common goals for students were acknowledged.

"Overall the school-based project was an exciting and memorable experience for us. All of the hard work we endured was worthwhile, as it will serve as a platform for some of us who have not taught in secondary before. We had the opportunity to work collaboratively for one last time before we went out for our teaching practice."
(T4/cs/para3).

This was an even greater concern to teams, as there was a feeling that these they required more induction to "catch up" with the understandings about teaching and learning of English Language as a second language in the non-supportive areas. This made many teams aware of just how much their understandings and practices had changed. Their reflections on student learning and subsequent planning were also issues at this time and the greater the discrepancy between the knowledge and relevant experience of "new" and "old" teachers became as aptly put by one of teams below:

"Though we were all experienced teachers in the field of teaching, there is still a whole lot to learn and experience. As quoted from a Chinese proverb, 'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step'. And we take this project as one of those single steps which we hoped could help us to venture more into the teaching profession."
(T1/cs/para.2)

The coordinator was a great source of support for them in identifying strategies for addressing this challenge. Students' improvement continued to delight and inspire them. It was often the stimulus to change their practice. The use of open-ended questions has been detailed as a major stated change in teachers' practice, and it was the evidence of the effect of these being highly visible to teachers that encouraged them to make further use of this teaching strategy.

Several teams commented that the collegiality within their professional learning team made it increasingly easier to share their "failures" as well as their successes:

Constructive comments were given from each member of the group after each lesson was conducted. After each lesson, we discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson especially by looking into the lesson

plan itself. A diversity of approaches was recognised and valued, leading to trust and support, risk-taking and a greater appreciation of differences. Table 1. Below showed 19 themes and exemplars as analyzed.

TABLE 1: Themes and exemplars of effective TESL teachers.

Theme	Description
Caring	Compassion, giving, kind, affection, warm, thoughtful, gentle, sensitive, considerate, concerned, careful, and appreciative.
Communication	Good communication skills, communicative, communicates, responsive, straight-forward, good communication between teacher and student/teacher, can clarify, language/verbal skills, informative, talkative, direct, well spoken, reads body language, and provides feedback.
Creative	Innovative , non-traditional, imagination, improvisation, and spontaneous.
Fairness	Reasonable, impartial, non-judgmental, equal to employees, treats students equally, not partial, objective, and not prejudicial.
Flexible	Easy-going, adaptable, agreeable, can improvise, easy to work with, and versatile.
Friendly	Outgoing, friend, approachable, and personable.
Being Fun	Funny, humorous, makes school fun, sense of humor, able to laugh, and entertaining.
Knowledgeable	Knows subject, knows new changes in education, knowledge of student needs, knowledgeable about events outside classroom, and informed.
Listening	Good listening skills, listen to teachers, and listen to students.
Manages Classroom	Manages classroom well, good classroom management, and controls class.
Motivating	Motivation, encouraging, and gives praise.
Involving	Involves students, engaging, and interactive.
Organized	Provides structure.
Passion for Teaching	Loves job, dedicated, loves education, wants to teach, and loves subject.
Builds Relationships	Mentor, mentors, establishes relationship with student, learns about the student, interest in student, spends time with student, provides one on one time with student, involved with student, shares own experiences with students, and is approachable.
Challenges Student	Encourages responsibility, expects more, expectant, challenging work, demanding, student accountability, and is a hard teacher.

Teaches Well	Competent, good teaching skills, good curriculum, creates good curriculum, prepares good curriculum, prepares students, prepares students for careers, helps develop students, works with students to increase strengths, tests on what teach, guides students, help struggling students, meaningful lessons, can apply knowledge, tutors, helps students learn, effective, teaches higher order thinking skills, be detailed in teaching lesson, facilitator, perform teaching duties, and a good philosophy.
Good Personality	Optimistic, happy, positive, good personality, enthusiastic, charisma, nice, energetic, personable, constructive, likeable, animated, and dynamic.
Understanding	Sympathetic, understands students, and comprehend.

The Solution: Some learning experiences that the undergraduates need to be exposed

Based on the findings from the case study mentioned above, we could see that thinking about teaching begins where all intellectual inquiry begins, with questions about what is going on and how to explain, support, and replicate answers that satisfy us. Recognizing their common intellectual patterns of questioning, exploring, testing, and professing during SBT program point to the emerging of new phrase, challenging the stereotypes and calling for further amplification: "the scholarship of teaching." According to Boyer, who is credited with coining the phrase in his widely discussed *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), our acts of discovery, application, integration, and teaching are all "scholarships," four mutually dependent and overlapping forms of inquiry focused on learning. Boyer's expanded conception of scholarship takes us to an idea of the university as a community of inquiry called the defining activity of research and teaching: the search to know between the lecturers (as a coordinator of the program) and the student teachers.

Firstly, the common purpose of teaching and research has been to involve students in the study. That endeavor is worthy. It asks students to do research on their own practices, including perhaps the reasons and results of enabling undergraduates to join in the scholarly or scientific work of the faculty. Conceiving of teaching as, in Shulman's words, "community property," leads us into the domain of uniqueness and privacy of teaching. However, the scholarship of teaching itself tells us that learning in the classroom is collaborative that the lecturer is not the only teacher in the room, and that what happens in it is not just up to us. Everyone implicated in the scholarship of teaching meets everyone else in a series of ever-wider

circles: students learning from each other in groups or teams in and outside a classroom; teachers learning from students; teachers talking to each other about teaching; teachers reading about how students learn and how other teachers teach; teachers eventually writing about teaching, participating in other ways in the professional conversation that is one of the signs and certifications of the scholarship of teaching.

Secondly, the learning experiences gained in alternating between radically different classroom settings i.e. lecture room, actual school classroom, etc; applying discoveries gleaned from one teaching experience to another one--these are hallmarks of vigorous and reflective approach to pedagogy. At first, I viewed teaching and research as separate endeavors with very little overlap between the classroom and my experiences as a scholar to be counterproductive. So I asked myself why I was in this profession to begin with. Therefore, this SBT program will help close the gap between my experiences and the classroom as scholar.

Thirdly, the program recasts lectures by incorporating active learning group activities whereby the students are grouped in small professional learning units. This coincided with my stand of believing in teaching in smaller classrooms. When they come to the university, they don't realize that a teaching program is supposed to be a more exciting, invigorating, intellectual atmosphere. They're supposed to ask questions and probe, but they don't know it, and we weren't helping them by lecturing at them." I know that if I can get them to process it more deeply, I can get them to remember it, whether they want to or not. Anything that causes them to elaborate on the principles will cause deeper processing, which will lead to deeper memory. Therefore, the program helps to inculcate the beauty of teaching in them. The teaching program demands collaborative and participative students as well as focusing on the variables that might influence retention: level of participation of the students, faculty-student interaction, and student-student interaction.

Fourthly, real life dilemma resolution starts where the students are. Conscious of their perspective, I build the classroom practice around student teachers' choice (they were given the option of choosing the schools). To help student teachers face the challenges, I recruited serving teachers who volunteer as peer mentors for optional study groups. The challenges of teaching provided the motivation for his own learning, which he now sees as a continuous, lifelong, self-critical process. Using reflection, evaluation, and assessment to improve his classes through what he calls "tinkering." But

it's fairly scientific tinkering. All fill out questionnaires, and reflect on their learning. As a lecturer, this helps me plan better to improve my course design and to explore questions in my research, such as what types of students are motivated by different techniques.

Fifthly, "The unexamined life is not worth living," I told the students. And so, on the lesson planning alongside syllabus, activities and techniques design, students find the topic "self-analysis." In the case study mentioned, self-analysis becomes much more than a reviewing of procedure (Schon, 1995). The task help student teachers venture into world of reflective, self-directed learning. Preparing the written self-analysis gets them thinking about what they learned and about how they learned it. Students don't hear the Coordinator telling them how to redo a finished project, but rather what they should consider changing when they revise it. The self-analytic essay is just one of the metacognitive strategies ways to help students think about how they think rather than using theory as an invisible framework for the assignments. Those learning experiences promote student control, self-pacing, and reflection. In the lessons they design, the built a foundation by demonstrating their new skills and talking through the steps. Students first recreate that model, then go on to modify it. They extend it a little further with an in-class exercise, then take themselves through an out of-class tutorial. The final step is an open-ended project of their own choice in which they synthesize all they've learned. Reporting on the results of one such class, I found the students' projects were far beyond my expectations. While there were some problems and imperfections, their design projects struck me as creative, visually sophisticated, and risk-taking.

Conclusion

In finality, the relational issue of the 'what' of teaching and how it relates to teaching outcome is the focus of improving the present situation in the scholarship of teaching and learning in Higher Education today. I have suggested the following based on my experience in improving the situation; they are as follows: the common purpose of teaching and research has been to involve students in the study, alternating between radically different classroom settings, applying discoveries gleaned from one teaching experience to another one. These are hallmarks of vigorous and reflective approach to pedagogy, recast lectures by incorporating active learning group

activities, real life problem solving by starting where the students are, and self-analysis to help student teachers venture into world of reflective, self-directed learning.

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