THE EXCELLENT TEACHER EDUCATOR JOURNEY: DELIBERATE PRACTICE AS A WAY TO BECOME EXPERT

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ABSTRACT

This study uncover the teacher educator professional journey since the day they become teacher until they were recognized as expert in teacher education. Research on expertise professional development was extensive, but little attention was explored on how expertise grew overtime. Knowledge and expertise acquired by the experts were tacit in nature and difficult to share. To access this, experts need to make their expertise explicit. That was why exploring the teacher educators’ journey along their continuing professional education (CPE) was the coverage of this study, as there was not much study on expert teacher educator. Narrative method was applied in this study, using in depth, semi structure interview to highlight how participants were selected through purposive sampling. Transcribed data were used to situate individual experience within participants’ personal experiences to check the similarities and differences in pattern. This framework consists of gathering stories, analysing them for key elements of the story, and then rewriting the stories to place them within a chronological sequence. This study revealed that there were various pathways the professionals can take in order to become expert. These pathways originated from critical events that occur within their career, eventually lead to the increase in roles and responsibilities of the teacher educators, and the progression of their career. These occurred naturally across the path of the participants’ career, and brought about changes in the person, which motivated them to acquire new knowledge, and changed their attitudes holistically. Participants took pride of their craftsmanship and their realization of self. This study implicates that a novice needs to undergo long periods of training and practice before they can become experts. It is impossible to shorten the trip, considering the extensive experience which is fundamental to development. Experts can become the role model for professionals in CPE, as they have experienced deliberate practice and have achieved success.

Keywords: professional journey, continuing professional development, narrative, expert, deliberate practice.

INTRODUCTION

Most researchers described their professional development as a journey. This metaphor clarify ‘the road taken by teacher educators’, in like manner as teachers who learnt to develop an identity as teacher educators and later as more experienced teacher educators who learnt and develop both, from professional activities (Swennen, etc. 2010, p.1).

This study is conducted to explore professional journey of the expert teacher educator through their continuing professional development (CPE) to become expert. It was driven by the researcher’s fascinated view towards this group of experts as they portray themselves confident professionally in carrying out their professional chores, leading and sharing with others. This is important especially to the novices who are to be informed on their future professionally, to deliver high quality service to the stakeholder in their profession.

This article presented one of the themes in research question two of the study: How ETE acquire their expertise? The themes were: positive environment to develop, deliberate practice, leadership through experience and collegiality. This article concentrate on deliberate practice.

According to Ericsson and Pool (2016), deliberate practice “is the most powerful approach to improving learning…”. Most of the time it is called “deliberate practice” (Ericsson and Pool, 2016; Colvin, 2008), but Coyle (2009) named it “deep practice” while Syed (2010) prefers “purposeful practice”.

1040
METHODOLOGY

The researcher choose narrative research approach which uncover holistic experience with complexity and richness in data. This allowed the researcher to study Excellent Teacher Educators (ETEs) professional journey to become expert in order to seek the evolving sequence of how the ETEs learned and grew in their profession. This approach permit researcher to highlight how individual ETEs negotiate their identities throughout their profession and promotions.

The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying seven ETEs, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering by using life course stages the meaning of those experiences using significant events. The participants in this study were teacher educators who were promoted to Excellent Lecturer post at selected Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia (ITEM) throughout Malaysia. They have vast experience teaching in schools, teaching teacher trainees, leaders in co-curricular activities, and they were also involved in management, planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum for schools and ITEM.

ETEs in this study participated in face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews followed by other research protocol to triangulate the individual data. Data comprised of variety of thick descriptions explaining the expert concerns on their CPE journey, and how they addressed the concerns. During data collection, semi-structured in depth interviews with the experts, observation, documents examination, the researcher meticulously kept her logbook. The logbook comprises of writing all field notes and memos to keep the research practice in check.

Audio recorded interview data was transcribed and after repetitive reading of the interview transcripts and listening to the recorded interviews, researcher sketched emerging ideas that transpired from the interview transcripts. This helped in suggesting tentative themes for further analysis. Multiple readings of the transcripts and numerous discussions with researcher’s supervisor helped the researcher to identify dominant and compatible themes that were clustered together. The identification of themes allowed the researcher to organize key concepts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Deliberate practice dwelled on research participants rigorous activities based on their ongoing knowledge and skill, which along the way enhanced their performance. Dr. Malek shared how he acquired knowledge:

“…reading of course, experience…sometime people are knowledgeable, but they cannot deliver, in my case, I do my homework, and find my way to deliver effectively…in away, having doing my master degree and PhD. in Educational Technology studies is an advantage”

Dr. Malek also shared how his rigorous activities sharpen his skills:

“…since I started teaching, offer came non-stop, teaching subjects and motivational talk, I never say no…”

“…ventured into education motivational newspaper article writing intensively for almost ten years now, and still producing…”

“…early tomorrow morning I will drive to Penang, sharing session with year six pupils preparing them for year six government exam. The next day I will urgent to Perlis to deliver a concept paper at an International Seminar organized by MARA University of Technology. It’s a concept paper on Media Application in Education. Now that is my core. Next week I will be in Lumut, for ITEM lecturers re-engineering program. I am the facilitator. After Lumut, I will move to Kelantan to be with Sekreteriat Perihatan Malaysia, to give a talk to students, on learning skill and motivation,…preparing them for examination…”

This was how he used his ongoing knowledge and skill to enhance his performance:

“…during training or motivational talk, I instilled creativity…I deliver some theory applicable, but not too theoretical,…let say Edward de Bono on thinking skills and tools, deliver in a lay man manner…later I used videos, games and finally bind up according to the needs of the training participants…6 hours for me, very fast, to the kids, it was too short…they gave me feedback that they enjoyed it,…what important was that I dared to face the challenge...”
Dr. Kwan shared how he acquired his knowledge and skill:

“…Well I tend to read a lot when I have topic to discuss, for example when I am invited to give talk, I will search and read many books, go on the net, read so that way I develop myself through reading…”

“…Courses/talk I went to by great speakers open my eyes to what quality trainer/speaker should be…sharing, asking and I find that most of the personal development is not that you do it yourself, the participants educate you, when the participants ask questions … they make me smarter, I know more issues now relating to the topic. So the more questions they ask, the more I begin to find out, and I go deeper into that subject. So professional development is two way it’s not one way. You can develop yourself, and people will develop you…”

“…You can develop yourself through self-reading, but I think you will not go far, you can read as much as you can, but those are all text book knowledge. Experience or tacit knowledge is important, tacit knowledge from people, people begin to ask question that you cannot find the answer in the text book…that generate your thinking”

Dr. Malek also shared how his rigorous activities which sharpen his skills:

“…next week I am going to Lumut, acting as trainer cum facilitator. The organizer said it is for reengineering problematic lecturer. It is more of professional development. I have done it so many times…so now I concentrated on professional development, motivation, educational technology and learning skill…”

The activities were practiced repeatedly and faulty were corrected, with the performer receiving immediate informative feedback and knowledge of performance result. Mr Jamal shared his experience:

“…it was a lot of hard work, it was a lot of commitment, passion in the job that I can safely say now, because I hold very strongly to the books I read. I learn a lot from books and I practiced them…you read many books…just to give ideas on how to tackle or handle people, sometimes we go according to our logic, sometimes we follow the books, other people have tried it, so no harm in trying, sometimes we win, sometimes we don’t, those are informative feedback…nothing is perfect, that don’t make you a failure, look on the success story, why you have to dwell on the failure…you learn from them…”

In addition, they attempted to acquire knowledge informally as well. Almost all the trainings were job related, which extended their professional knowledge and open their scope of thinking. Dr Kwan shared his experience:

“…I gave lectures and workshop to train them to give lectures. Their problems, conducting them…they were developing me too. Because their problems were actually knowledge to me. Those were tacit knowledge they were sharing with me. So I am still learning… Learning doesn’t stop I am still learning now…”

All seven research participants practice deliberately in their discipline. Dr. Sim’s expertise was Chemistry:

“…I was involved in teaching, developing new curriculum program for the subject, and became the coordinator for the subject in a twinning program with a prominent university in Australia…”

Madam Lin’s expertise were Educational Studies and Scouts:

“…I have been teaching Educational Studies for pre service and in service teachers, even when the Malaysian Air Force trainers asked for andragogy approach for teaching, I delivered. I was also asked to handle twinning program Educational Studies courses with Queensland University…I went through all evaluations for Malaysian Scouts Leadership Programs to become four beads leader and now I became trainer for leaders at Asia Pacific Region Scouts…”

Personality factor which reflect persistence and deliberate practice, in acquiring long-term goals in job performance, positively moved participants forward towards mastery goals to become expert.

**DISCUSSION**

Deliberate practice in CPE has helped the participants to develop their specialization in their area. It may not come directly, but it builds up from basic teaching into subject matters, into something more specific in the domain of
education. They structured their task with explicit goals to improve performance. These participants are persistence people, their effort and their enjoyment in carrying out their tasks or practices was followed with continual feedback, reflection and deliberate effort to improve their performance. This experience motivated them to learn, and resulted in higher level of attainment.

Ericsson and Pool (2016) claim that:

“…deliberate practice is the most powerful approach to improving learning …this is a matter of practical training, not just the assimilation of abstract knowledge. It demands embarking on a realistic path to achieving a specific goal by achieving mastery of successively more difficult specific skills …”

This suits participants in this study where they deliberately practice their existing knowledge by assimilating them together with new knowledge which accumulate during practice from their environment. This process finally enriched participants’ knowledge and skills to become expert.

This study shows that expert performance is not reached with less than 10 years of deliberate practice (Ericsson et al., 1993). This study explains expert performance as the end result of individuals' prolonged efforts to improve performance while negotiating motivational and external constraints. In most domains of expertise, individuals begin at the beginning of their profession a regimen of effortful activities (deliberate practice) designed to optimize improvement. Individual differences, even among elite performers, are closely related to assess amounts of deliberate practice. Many characteristics once believed to reflect innate talent are actually the result of intense practice extended for a minimum of 10 years. Analysis of expert performance provides unique evidence on the potential and limits of extreme environmental adaptation and learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The term deliberate practice in this study may be borrowed from a term popular in Ericsson’s (1996) theory, but deliberateness in this study does not happen in lab experiment with observation and cognitive task analysis as a method. It practically happened to the research participants over a prolong time frame since they were novice teachers until they become expert and still moved on sharing their expertise in their field.

REFERENCES