

## **The Generation, Dissemination and Communication of Teaching Knowledge in a University-School Collaboration Program**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the focus is on 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. School based teaching is an outside learning program to integrate teaching experience in real teaching situations. I have conducted a case method study (Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987; Johnson, 1999) 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 teaching cases based in the teaching program conducted by my TESL undergraduates, the professional growth of knowledge, teaching practice, attitudes, confidence, teamwork, and collegiality elements were found to be in line with the required macro teaching skills. Thematic 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 method, School-based Teaching program, teacher training, TESL

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### **INTRODUCTION**

We have witnessed a monumental growth of teaching knowledge enacted within the campus wall, but of more relevance and possibly much more importantly, are those generated outside the university premise. Incidentally, the process of generation, dissemination and communication of teaching knowledge in higher education (HE) institution must be linked and matched to the needs of public schools. Besides transferring knowledge to enhance the students' competence, HE institutions need to equip student teachers with professional skills comprising of teaching skills, technical skills, and soft skills. Teaching skill refers to behavioral job skill training in term of practical theories, techniques, and behavioral guidelines. If applied succinctly, it will enhance teaching practice in term of the ability to work in a team, doing problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, etc.; (Evers et al, 1998). Technical skills are skills used to represent the ability to accomplish a certain task such as preparing a teaching portfolio properly. While "soft skills" refers to wider areas that are often not easy to be differentiated from teaching skills that consisted of communication skills, interpersonal skills, innovation and creativity, language skills, and assertive skills (Gandhi, 2008). These skills should be designed to be incorporated 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 by integration into the subject and developed within the mechanism of the learning process.

Consequently, HE institutions should be aware of the needs for the students to acquire and enhance the skills in teaching so that they are successfully groomed as effective TESL teachers. SBT program is a program that was designed to bridge the gap between HE institutions and the secondary school as the

recruiter or graduates-user by placing student teachers to have some real teaching experience. Usually, student teachers get this experience during their practicum program in their last semester/ final year of study. However, practicum will not suffice to be an effective tool as the focus will be more on evaluation aspects rather than for training and development purpose (as in Universiti Malaysia Sabah's case). Therefore, school based teaching as an outside learning program to integrate theories and real teaching experience before undergoing the practicum program becomes a very viable medium to close the gap. The benefit for the students is that they could gain invaluable on-site experience in the school instead of the usual micro-teaching session or mock teaching session conducted at the university as a traditional tool in enhancing the teaching skills of the students. This helps them make decision on the viable teaching practice strategies, procedural as well as pedagogical content knowledge and, can provide an edge when they begin their practicum in the final semester whereby assessment will be made.

Furthermore, student teachers who had undergone the experience will have a better journey to socialize in school and at ease to apply various techniques and strategies learnt. In a way, students undergoing the practicum can be an invaluable asset to the school and HE institution when evaluating for students' ability for the teaching fitness as well as in gauging the success of the practicum program. However, whether the practicum will reflect good performance of student teachers must take into consideration the sustainability of the collaboration between the HE institution and the school in providing the fit, as well as the effectiveness of the curriculum and preparation program for the students in general.

### ***Purpose of the study***

The purpose of this study was two folds: (a) To examine the characteristics that student teachers perceived 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 TESL secondary school student teachers?
2. What is the effect of learning teams on identified characteristics of effective TESL secondary school student teachers?

## **METHOD**

This is a case method study (Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987; Johnson, 1999) that situates a case specific to the context and includes the events, time and space. Student teachers were required to establish a Professional Learning Team for English Language Teaching (ELT). Teams were made up of all final year student teachers and the lecturers. There were 5 teams altogether. Each team comprises of 3 - 5 members. 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 (Bandaraya National Secondary School), Menggatal, Sabah, Malaysia; 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 ELT issues at the school; and to consider issues in lesson planning raised as a case method study project. In addition, participants responded to the question of "Now, please list three to six characteristics that you think make teachers effective". Specifically, the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) served as the qualitative data analysis technique that was used. In accordance with this approach to grounded theory, our steps of data analysis included initial and focused coding, axial coding, memo writing and theoretical coding, and theory construction. This process involved reading and re-reading all participants' written responses and analyzing them thematically.

## Case Method

Case methods are a common method used in teacher education to reveal the particular classroom practice. They are situated and specific to the context and include the events, time and space. Cases tend to include the theories or principles, dramatic tension, rich description of the complexities of teachers' work, and the resolved issues. Johnson (1999) illustrated how teachers conceptualize, construct an explanation for, and resolve a problem in the instructional context under their master's TESL program by using the case method format as follows: The Context, The Problem, Case Discussion, and The Solution; which will be adopted in the discussion of the result this study.

## The Context

As a TESL lecturer in the School of Education and Social Development (SPPS), Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia 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 programme 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 Dilemma

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.

## DISCUSSION

From the start of the longitudinal study there was evidence of a difference between the intensional and 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 recognized and valued, leading to trust and support, risk-taking and a greater appreciation of differences. Table 1 below showed thematic analysis that contributed to 19 themes and description/exemplars of effective TESL teachers as found in the data analyzed.

Table 1: Themes and exemplars of effective TESL teachers.

Theme	Focus codes/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.

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). They voiced time constraint as an obstacle in their journey to teach in real time as seen in the extract below:

*“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 as portrayed in the extract below:

*“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 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:

“... 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)

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

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. This study showed that the common purpose of teaching and research in higher education institutions has been to involve students in the study, alternating between radically different classroom settings, applying discoveries gleaned from one teaching experience to another. These are hallmarks of vigorous and reflective approaches to pedagogy, recast lectures by incorporating active learning group activities, real life problem solving to help student teachers venture into a world of reflective, self-directed learning.

### Defining Research and Teaching in a University-School Collaboration Program

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 student teachers’ common intellectual patterns of questioning, exploring, testing, and professing during the SBT program points to the emerging of a new phrase, challenging the stereotypes and calling for further amplification: “the scholarship of teaching.” According to Boyer (1990), who is credited with coining the phrase in his widely discussed *Scholarship Reconsidered*, 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 coordinators 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 and that the lecturer is not the only teacher in the room. Everyone in the scholarship of teaching circle 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 and actual school classroom are hallmarks of vigorous and reflective approach to pedagogy. 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 the students come to the university, they don’t realize that a teaching program is supposed to be a more exciting, invigorating, intellectual atmosphere. They are supposed to ask questions and probe, but they don’t know it, and we were not 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, the classroom practice revolved around student teachers' choice (they were given the option of choosing the schools). To help student teachers face the challenges, serving teachers were recruited from those who volunteer to be peer mentors for optional study groups. The challenges of teaching provided the motivation for their own learning, which they now see as a continuous, lifelong, self-critical process. They used reflection, evaluation, and assessment to improve their classes through what they call "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," (Anon) 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). 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, they build 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.

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