

TEACHING AND ITS MANIFESTATION AMONG EXCELLENT EDUCATORS IN A SELECTED PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

by

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Abstract

The research was conducted to explore the understanding of teaching of excellent educators in a selected public university. Three research questions guided the study; first, what do educators believe to be the purposes of education?, second, what facilitated the understanding of teaching development?, and third, how is the understanding of teaching adhered to, manifested in their teaching practice? The study employed qualitative multiple case study approach to answer the research questions. The primary data were collected through in depth interviews and the secondary data were collected through observations in the classroom, laboratory and discussion sessions after lectures. The analyses of this study were done through within-case analysis and cross-case analysis explained the findings from the four excellent educators. The study discovered that the purposes of education were for change, transmitting knowledge, and character building. Respondents' background as well as understanding of learning and teaching concepts had contributed to the development of the understanding of teaching. The adhered understanding was manifested in their teaching. These can be observed through their preparation and openness to assists students. Their teaching roles as experts and organizers were reflected in their teaching. They have been a major source of reference for their students as well as the society at large.

Introduction

Education plays an important role in society, and many people devote their lives to teaching. Teaching, for Palmer(1998), requires courage. For Garsha (1996), it is understood in terms of style. For Boyer (1990), it is scholarship. For Angelo

essed. For Walmer (1990), it is only developed
action. For some, it s a task. But for Worley
(2001), it is a charge, a challenge, and a choice because teaching remains a duty
to be fulfilled, a delight to be enjoyed, and a discipline to be embraced and a
decision to be repeatedly made with each entrance into the classroom. It is not
only a word but teaching requires appreciation by educators. Therefore teaching,
education and learning are closely related and are complement each other. For
the purpose of this study, the people who are involved in teaching are called as
educators. They educate other people through teaching and learning process as
teaching is an ever-learning experience. They are the people who can give
impact to the development of one's personality, intellect, emotion and physics.
Many asserted that educators play important roles in many aspects. The
importance of an educator emphasized by Langgulung (1986) is that one is not
considered highly educated if he has not been guided by an educator even
though he has read many books as references. The knowledge obtained from
reading books will be better explained and discussed with guidance. Worley
(2001) stated that three elements that made-up an outstanding educator are the
philosophy of teaching, conceptual or ideological foundation that underlies the
philosophy of teaching and the people who have been most important in shaping
and guiding teaching. Lauwery (1979) expressed that

The strength of an education system must largely
depend upon the quality of its teachers. However
enlightened the aims, however up-to-date and
generous equipment, however efficient the
administration, the value to the children is determined
by the teachers. There is therefore no more important
matter than of securing a sufficient supply of the right
kind of people to the profession, providing them with
the best possible training and ensuring to them a
status and esteem commensurate with the
importance and responsibility+(pg. 35)

Al-Attas, a contemporary Islamic thinker, for example, emphasizes that educators
need to be competent in their field as well as have good and consistent moral
conduct in order to become quality educators (Mohd Nor, 1998). It is the
educators who decide what is to be taught, who should be taught, how it should
be taught and for what purpose. They can use common sense, which is obtained
from years of experience or through observations, when making these decisions
(Apps, 1973). However, the decision which is made based on common sense is
vacillate from one situation to another and from time to time (pg. 5). Therefore
an alternative to better decision making, educators base their decisions on their
beliefs are fundamental to the decision making process (Fitzgibbons, 1981) and
will be reflected in their teaching.

fe believe certain things about the activities they perform. The act of philosophizing is an attempt to express such beliefs, whether for one's own clarification or to communicate more clearly with others (Zinn, 1983). Philosophy is less something to be done, to a greater or lesser extent, in the course of daily life (p. 10). Rather than being a highly specialized discipline, philosophy is the single non-specialized discipline, which is interrelated in some sense with other disciplines. It is used to help make sense out of the world as a whole. Its three areas (reality, knowledge and value) touch on all aspects of the human experience.

Bremald (1955) further explains that philosophy is inseparable from living experience. That is people will philosophize when he tries to express the things he believe about lives and about relation to the rest of life.

According to Havighurst (1953), the crowning accomplishment of adolescence is the achieving of a mature set of values and a set of ethical controls that characterize a good man and a good citizen. This is the process that started in early childhood with the forming of ethical concepts, the dawn of moral conscience, and the beginning of moral responsibility in one's relations with others. The individual's relations to social groups and institutions and his concepts of the place of man in nature are involved in the two developmental tasks namely (i) desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour and (ii) acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to good behaviour.

Al Ghazali occupies a unique position in the history of Muslim religious and philosophical thought by whatever standard to judge him: breadth of learning, originality, or influence (Saeed, 1963). He has been acclaimed as the Proof of Islam, the Ornament of Faith and the Renewer of Religion (pg. 581). His teachings either constructive or critical, cannot however be fully understood without knowing the story of his life (pg. 582). Whatever he thought and wrote came with the living reality of his own experience. Therefore to understand one's philosophy is very significant to have study one's life and experience. Al Ghazali who lived as an orphan has influenced his hard work to survive. He was not the first scholar of distinction in his family: there had been his grand-uncle, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who was a theologian and jurisconsult of great repute. His father was a pious dervish who would not allow anything to be eaten by him unless he earns it with his own hands and efforts (pg. 583). Al Ghazali was also known for the same behaviour. He was brought up by a pious man, a friend of his father and hunger for knowledge. He became an educated man as early as twenty years old. His early life and his experiences have contributed to the development of his philosophy.

the philosophy of teaching and the practice of teaching? This section will review how these two were interconnected and complemented each other. There has been tremendous research be it theoretical and empirical devoted to the understanding of teachers and their classroom practices (Shavelson and Stern, 1981; Clark and Peterson, 1986; Day, Pope and Denicolo, 1990; Hamachek, 1999). For the purpose of this study it is argued that a compelling and defensible understanding how educators make sense of the tasks and challenges that confront them daily is through the exploration of their beliefs, values, and attitudes . the philosophy. Research have shown that teacher's cognitive and other behaviors are guided by and make sense in relation to a personally held philosophy (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Thompson, 1992 and Hand and Treagust, 1994)

There were certain agreements mark philosophical discourses with respect to teaching. Greene (1997) stated that teaching cannot be assimilated to learning as teaching is one thing and learning is quite another even though it is agreed that teaching is an intentional act aimed at the achievement of learning and that learning signifies a conscious coming to know (McClellan,1976 and Passmore, 1980) or being able to think. Teaching is concluded as triadic relation by Passmore (1980) which means that if anyone teaches there must be something he teaches and someone he teaches it to. At least two people present while teaching takes place. Scheffler (in Passmore, 1980) said that ~~to~~ teach is to aim at the achievement of learning but not necessarily to achieve it+ (pg. 19). Passmore (1980) concluded that teaching could be referred to ~~aiming~~ at achieving learning+or sometimes as ~~actually~~ achieving learning+. It could be an attempt word or sometimes successful word (pg. 20).

Teaching philosophy has been called differently by some scholars. Brookfield (1990) called it as individual vision in teaching. He stated that it is the individual educator or teacher's way of understanding teaching in terms of its objectives, means and reasons for doing what he is doing. As for Hagen, L (1998) teaching philosophy is also personal values and beliefs in teaching. He emphasized the importance of teaching objectives, teaching methods, educators' expectation and congruency of objectives, methods and expectation with the national-level aspiration in teaching the respective discipline. According to Zinn (1990), teaching philosophy is more like an approach or view upon teaching. Teaching philosophy is also said as an orientation or guide for an educator for his teaching practice. Therefore it is very important for educators to know their own teaching philosophy and this can lead to consistency in practice (pg. 83). Whatever teaching philosophy is called it is obviously related to beliefs, values and attitudes related to the teaching-learning exchange (Heimlich and Norland, 1994). They asserted that beliefs, values and attitudes were three elements that made up a philosophy (pg. 38) and used to guide decision making in the practical world. Articulating a philosophy of teaching and learning can be helpful for teachers in many ways. Philosophical reflection on classroom practices can

by helping teachers being consistent (Arends et al., 2001) and creating a stable and trusting classroom environment (pg. 30). Teachers who identify, examine, alter and adopt a philosophy assert control over their behavior (Heimlich and Norland, 1994) and these make the difference between professional and practitioner (Elias and Merriam, 1980). Without articulated philosophy, decisions are likely to be based on habit or trend, resulting in incongruence and inconsistency in word and deed (Heimlich and Norland, 1994).

Lewis (1997) considered teaching philosophy as a framework which directs and leads teacher in practice. Teaching philosophy helps to organize thinking, clarify goals and guide in decision-making. All these lead to consistency to what an educator is doing. A teaching philosophy includes the kind of curriculum employed by an educator. It can be seen by deciding the type of student to produce as a result of teaching. Teaching style and interaction with students are also embedded in teaching philosophy. An educator will decide which is more important in teaching; skill or content or how to learn. Teaching philosophy as a framework informed an educator either to emphasize on the process of teaching or the end result of teaching.

Reported by Washington University Teaching Center (2003), teaching philosophy is a personal statement on one's teaching beliefs and it is not an article on teaching and learning. Teaching philosophy reflects one's:

- i. objectives as a teacher
- ii. methods used to achieve the objectives
- iii. assessment and evaluation towards the effectiveness in achieving objectives and
- iv. importance being a teacher.

In addition, writing a teaching philosophy statement helps to clarify one's beliefs and reveals inconsistencies in putting those beliefs into practice.

According to Tajul and Aini (2002), realization of the educational philosophy is heavily lies on the educators or teachers. One of the characteristics of effective teacher is that he is able to realize and appreciate the educational philosophy through his teaching. Teachers, in other words, must have their own teaching philosophy which has to be congruence with the national educational aspiration. Al Syaibani (1979) suggests that it is the understanding of the teaching methodology concept and its basis that make up a good teaching. Before a teacher could teach and become a good teacher he must equipped himself with some knowledge of principles of his teaching (p. 591). He outlined seven principles namely:

1. A teacher must know the students' motivation and interests;
2. A teacher must know the purpose of learning;
3. Be able to identify the maturity of the students;
4. A teacher must know the differences between individual students;

- provide practical experiences for the students;
understanding, integrating experiences, genuine and
freedom of thinking and
7. A teacher must transform the teaching and learning process as a meaningful experience.

He agreed with some modern definitions of learning process - as a memorization process, as a mental exercises process and as a behavioral change (p. 593). However, Brookfield (1990) points out four purposes for developing teaching philosophy:

1. Personal purpose: % a distinctive organizing vision . a clear picture of why you are doing what you are doing that you can call up at points of crisis . is crucial to your personal sanity and morale.+(p. 16)
2. Political purpose: % a sense that your position is grounded in a well-developed and carefully conceived philosophy of practiceõ You are more likely to gain a measure of respect for your thoughtfulness and commitment, which is important both for your self-esteem and for your political survival.+(p. 17)
3. Professional purpose: % a commitment to a shared rationale for college teaching is important for the development of professional strengths among teachers.+(pp 17-18)
4. Pedagogical purpose: %teaching is about making some kind of dent in the world so that the world is different than it was before you practiced your craft. Knowing clearly what kind of dent you want to make in the world means that you continually ask yourself the most fundamental evaluative questions of all- What effect am I having on students and on their learning?+(pp. 18-19)

Problem Statement

Higher education occupies a prominent place in society and a countless number of individuals devote their lives to teaching in a wide variety of formal or informal higher educational settings such as universities, colleges, polytechnics, extension services and some other settings.

Malaysia, in particular, has both public and private higher educational institutions and they have a significant role to play in complementing the Government's effort in propelling Malaysia as a regional center of educational excellence (Hassan, 2001). The tremendous and vast development in terms of number of the institutions and number of students has raised many educational issues that the researcher felt the declining quality of education and educators as one of the factor that lead to this situation.

The quality and effectiveness of the teachers were significant to the academic success of all students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Wise and

mentioned that quality education requires quality methods, Winitzky and Tannenbaum, 1998; Nik Azis, 1994, Naquib, 1996). In fact, according to Biggs (1995), one of the major problems in higher education is the glaring disparity between what teachers preach about quality learning and what they practice. In addition, teaching methods most commonly used and the means of assessing learning outcomes simply do not line up with the aims of higher education institutions. Rosnani (2001) in her Malaysian educational curriculum analysis discovered that the most conspicuous weakness is the ambiguity or sometimes the non-existence of a clear philosophy of education which acts as the basis for any educational institution. And as result the educational philosophy is not reflected when it has to underlie it (pg. 9). Thus, the researcher believed that philosophy and specifically philosophy of teaching and its understanding, was one of the elements that contributed to quality education. Who teaches? What to teach? How to teach? Why teach? What are philosophical questions that educators need to consider. The answers to these questions can be found in the understanding of teaching.

However, it is important to explore how understanding of teaching contributes to the educational quality? According to Merriam (1982) understanding and philosophy can inform practice, guide administrators, teachers and counselors in their everyday practice. These revealed that they are very important to education and its practitioners. Hitt (1988) asserts that every profession is guided by certain beliefs or values and that these values represent what educators stand for and what is for them and what educators believe in is crucial to the success of the organization (Smith, 1991). Meanwhile research in other places have shown that educators teaching philosophy and teaching practice were known to influence the quality of education (Carson, 1985; DeCoux 1992; Spurgeon, 1994; Budak, 1997; Hughes, 1997; Williams, 1999).

While teaching at higher education is studied in Malaysia, there is no research on excellent educators in their understanding of teaching and how it is manifested in their practice. Not much is known about understanding of teaching of educators at the higher educational institutions in Malaysia in particular. How do they understand their teaching? Do they behave consistently with their teaching-learning process? Or do they change their teaching behaviour in different situations? How do they reflect their beliefs and values while teaching as well as while evaluating students? How do they put theory into practice? The purpose of this study is to explore the understanding of teaching adhered to excellent educators and how the understanding is manifested in their teaching practice.

Whilst the abovementioned problems were considered as the fundamental guide in this study, the central questions can be stated as follows:

1. What do educators believe to be the purpose of education to be?



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Understanding of teaching development?
Understanding adhered is manifested in their teaching?

Methodology

Qualitative research design is employed in this study. It addresses the uniqueness of an individual within a particular situation and time. Hence, the intent of qualitative research methodology is to understand the importance of individual attach to a particular actions. Merriam (2001) clarifies that it is based on one fact that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. It is the experiences of individuals that qualitative researcher would like to uncover and how they make sense of their world. Qualitative method can be used to disclose and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is not known (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). According to Stake (1995), qualitative researchers try to understand complex interrelationships, and to describe them using thick description that is as rich as the experience itself.

Qualitative methodology is most suitable to describe accordingly the facts and characteristics of the research interest (Merriam and Simpson, 1984). The study is focused only on particular issues and cases and therefore qualitative methodology which permits these is employed.

The important section of the study was the investigation processes and the continuous data analyses. This referred to what Bogdan and Biklen (1982) mention that qualitative researcher is interested in studying and understanding a particular phenomenon, the nature of events and the nuances of interaction. This is what meaning referred to and this approach is concerned with how people negotiate meaning and interpret their experiences through interacting with other people. How the respondents make meanings and interpretation of their experiences could be very different from other people whom might have gone through similar experiences. It is therefore the main focus of the qualitative study is not to make generalization but rather to what other settings and subjects the study can be generalized (p. 45). It is the context-sensitivity that qualitative methodology concerned most. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) develop characters that help to define a qualitative design. First, qualitative research uses the natural settings as sources of data and the researcher is the instrument. The researcher plays an important role as an instrument in both data collection and data analysis. Qualitative data are always in the forms of words (descriptions) or pictures and the researcher is very much interested in the process and the natural settings. Finally it builds generalization inductively rather than testing theories and making hypotheses out of it. These characters provide the greatest possibility for making significant contributions to the knowledge base in applied areas such as education and human resource development (Merriam, 2001). Qualitative methodology and its paradigm are more suitable to employ in order to

collected and analyzed through the researcher\$

This study required deep understanding of the respondents and in-depth interviews were conducted to uncover the respondentsq understanding of teaching. The identification of individual understanding of teaching has not been research in the country and the result of this study was an attempt to provide guidance for other educators to become excellent educators.

According to Merriam (2001), a case study is an examination of specific phenomena such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. Merriam also has identified four main characteristics of qualitative case study:

- i. qualitative case study is particularistic . a specific situation or phenomenon is studied perhaps to understand a more general problem;
- ii. it is descriptive, using data from documents, interviews and field notes to illuminate the phenomenon of interest;
- iii. it is heuristic in that readers of the case study can obtain new understanding of the phenomenon, and
- iv. Case study relies on inductive reasoning and the knowledge gained from the case study is concrete and contextual.

It is also able to explain the processes and the dynamics of practices. Merriam (1988) explained that case study approaches a problem practice from holistic perspective, the inter-set is in process rather than outcome, in context rather than a specific variable in discovery rather than confirmation and the goal of case study was to understand the particular study in depth.

Case study was chosen as it has its own purpose in describing and interpreting a unit of interest, can result in abstractions and conceptualizations of the phenomena that will guide subsequent studies (Merriam and Simpson, 1984). It tries to understand the phenomena in its natural settings.

Findings

The findings show that the respondents are highly educated with the highest degree PhD and committed with their job. They were at their fifties, forties and late thirties during the time of the interview. They have been awarded various awards from different bodies including the university. Their establishment and recognition determined their excellent work as an educator who teach and as researchers. They did a lot of reflection thinking when they wanted to describe their early years\$ life and their facial expression indicated that they have gone through hardships living on those days. They do not wish the new generation to experience the hardships they have experienced by providing the best education for them. One of the respondents has a daughter studying at the same university

ghter will develop her potentials to the fullest. As married, they always put their family in the picture. They described themselves as very fatherly and having time to entertain their spouse and children. One of them refused to have a maid in the house as he believes that as a parent he has to take care of the needs of his children. He managed to spend some of his precious time to fulfill his family's needs. All these experiences were blended and were selected to become their indicator for future living. All the respondents believed that education major purpose was to change for better living. However, they also described education as acquiring knowledge, transmit knowledge, transfer of knowledge and act accordingly. Education will make a person change from not knowing state to known state. Having the belief that education can change to a better living they strive for education since they were young. As a result of good education one will develop good character too. They believed that the type of education obtained will determine the type of person one will be. Education was referred to as either formal or informal. People learn best through experience and they believed that their experiences have taught them and moulded them to become what they are now.

They believed that a good teacher is knowledgeable with the subject matter. What ever knowledge they have they will try to transmit it to the students. They believed that they need to keep abreast with the latest knowledge and information about their field of expertise. Being broadly exposed at the international level, they were considered very competent and expert in their field. They were all able to organize and manage the classroom and the environment to inculcate students to learn. All respondents have good relationship with the students that encourage them to see them for individual consultation.

Their early life in school and their social economic status at that time were among the factors that contribute to their educational philosophy development. They were having a hard time to get proper education. It was the system at the time when education was meant for those with money and status. Being nobody in the society has made their school days more difficult. Continuing their education at a higher level made them experienced a lot of challenges, even though they were in the intelligent students category. These were part and parcel of their endeavor to enable them to go for tertiary education. All respondents had experienced tertiary education and achieved their highest degree abroad. They have utilized the time and the universities to study hard and finally become good students. Along the way they collected some role models and helped them to mould them. Those models could be from one person or from a collection of many individuals. The findings also indicated that the working environment and the organization itself have given them a lot of opportunities to develop them to become excellent teacher and excellent researcher. The organization has allowed them to do work at the unlimited ground.

The development of the understanding of teaching was then manifested into their practice as educators. The understanding they adhered to can be recognized

personal attributes and their teaching roles. Their personal attributes such as being receptive and always make themselves available meeting the students needs. These included guidance and advices for the students. They have employed varieties of approaches and techniques to become excellent teacher and excellent researcher. Their teaching roles unveiled their understanding of teaching. They guide learning and direct learning for their students as well as their colleagues. It was a great effort to provide guidance for their colleagues to work as a group and for the development of the department or faculty. Most of them guide learning through their experiences. They believed that their experiences were educative and precious for them to share with others be it their students or colleagues. Their teachings were not only observed in the formal situation but also in the very informal situation. These were observed during the classroom observations and also by shadowing. The consultation with students also took place via telephone and electronic mail or email.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the respondents revealed their beliefs in their teaching. This referred to their attitudes, and their teaching roles. They had some personal qualities of receptive and availability inside the classroom and outside the classroom. They were willing to listen to their students and willing to allocate some time for them for several reasons. They put no barrier between the students and themselves especially when they were having academic discussion. Be it personal problems or academic problems. They played their role as the organizer and as the expert. They guides and evaluates learning. They did a lot of reflections. They used their educative experiences when teaching their students and guiding their colleagues. Being a professor in related field has made them major references for many people. Their expertise was established at the international level too. They became resourceful to the students, the university and the society at large.

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