

Chapter 3

Reflective Learning and the Growth of Intellect and Identity

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ABSTRACT

Reflection in learning is crucial as it provides learners with the chance to think about what they do, clarify what they understand by their actions, and adapt ways of working towards achieving goals. The continuous doing and posing inquiries about personal experiences is key to learners' intellectual growth and understanding of professional identity. This chapter outlines how content and professional knowledge of student-teachers in a Malaysian university progress through engagement in research process, and how involvement in research shapes their teacher personality and qualities as they become more critical and open-minded during the learning process. The study shows that reflection can promote self-regulation of learning habits that enhance growth of intellect and professional identity. The findings have implications on the provision of teacher education in higher education. It is imperative that teaching and learning activities help learners to recognise, understand, appreciate and reflect on their personal, social and professional development.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter charts the growth of learners' intellect and identity, via the research training that they undertake in the teacher training programme, as they gradually assume their respective professional roles. Learning to research, and researching to learn, in this context, enables them to make sense of, and reflect on, not only the relevant theoretical concepts but also their profession. The chapter also invites higher education to re-examine its current pedagogical frameworks and practices to be more vigilant on the roles of educators and learners. This is because educators hold the leadership and the responsibility for the quality of learning that nurtures learners' intellectual and identity growth. Learners should be

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allowed to engage in teaching and learning activities that help them to recognise, understand, appreciate and reflect on their personal, social and professional development.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Malaysia, higher education is very much governed by the national agenda. As the country is steadily progressing towards becoming a knowledge-based society, the demand for multi-skilled workers who are creative, critical and knowledgeable is increasing. Essentially, the government believes that well-rounded individuals who have acquired knowledge and skills and internalised positive and progressive attitudes, values and ethics can be developed through education and training (Economic Planning Unit, 2015). The role of education the social and economic development has again been emphasised in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, that is, “to equip our students holistically to allow them to succeed in the 21st Century” (Muhyiddin in Ministry of Education, 2012).

As the biggest provider of higher education (student population has expanded to 175,000 in 2015) in Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi MARA (thereafter, UiTM) is now pressured more than ever to take a proactive role in the creation of graduates who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, and desirable moral and ethical attitudes. This is hardly surprising as Wood (2011, p. 209) argues that “that a college degree itself doesn’t necessarily represent much of anything in the way of intellectual attainment or enhanced practical skill”.

Global Agenda Council on Employment (2014) reports that policy-makers and social partners across the world have become increasingly concerned with the match between their workforces’ skills and their labour markets’ needs. Some assert that the seemingly high number of employers experiencing such difficulties is due to young people and workers being ill-prepared for work. Across countries participating in the survey, an average 34% of employers cite a lack of technical competencies, while 19% believe that candidates (also) lack workplace competencies (i.e. “soft skills”) (Global Agenda Council on Employment, 2014). Skill gaps usually reported by employers around the globe include a lack of generic or soft skills, namely team work, interpersonal skills, leadership, knowledge of foreign languages, readiness to learn, problem solving and ICT skills. Given these concerns, the need for more qualified graduates within the UiTM systems has become more critical, and the challenge is to develop and implement programmes and courses that can equip graduates with the 21st Century skills sets, particularly those related to life and career.

In the context of teacher education, similar efforts have been made to nurture and develop educators who are competitive, flexible, dynamic and performance-oriented. The development of students to full-fledged professionals requires hands-on experience and continuous reflection. This includes learning to research others’ practices so that they could experiment with, and reflect on, their own practices. Constant engagement in these processes can promote self-regulation of learning habits that enhance intellect advancement and growth of professional identity.

GROWTH OF INTELLECT AND IDENTITY

Intellect is a dimension of personality that “reflects individual differences in the ability and tendency to seek, detect, comprehend, utilize, and appreciate complex patterns of information, both sensory

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