

# LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE OF TEACHER EDUCATORS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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## Abstract

This research was conceived to find out the learning constructs of teacher educators including what they learned in the workplace, the sources of learning and the factors that motivated teachers to learn. The study revealed that the workplace was a rich avenue for learning where teachers in higher education institutions learned the professional concepts and human relationship skills necessary for effective practice. The teacher educators learned best from self-reflection, printed materials and co-teachers. Other sources of learning were from in-service trainings, administrators and students. What and how teachers learned were influenced by their length of teaching experience. Extrinsic factors like salary, incentives and self-motivating factor like teacher's commitment motivated the educators to learn.

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**Keywords:** Learning, workplace, teacher educators, adult learners

## Introduction

Society expects teachers to be concerned with students' learning and to induce learning in others. However, less emphasis is given to teachers' learning and how they learned practical knowledge in the practice of their profession. Tickle (1987) expressed the need to look into the value of practical knowledge because it leads to competence and beyond competence to professional excellence. Practical knowledge is stressed by Ryan (1998) as workplace learning. The workplace is a learning organization and teaching is a workplace learning experience. To be effective, the teacher must gain insights into their own teaching and learn from the experiences in the workplace. However, the imperatives to address the workplace-learning component of teacher educators are not often articulated (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000).

Educators and researchers are beginning to recognize the value of workplace learning in the 1990's. Teachers have so much to learn in the workplace. The presence of authentic and goal-directed activities in the

workplace as well as the everyday engagement in problem solving, make the workplace setting a good avenue for learning. The need to learn is cited by Sikes (1985), stating that in order to survive, the teachers have to learn the skills, the craft technology of teaching to come to terms with the reality of the situation in the workplace. Educators have to learn the three most crucial functions of facilitating learning, managing the classroom and making decisions. Learning takes place in several levels, in varied settings and different circumstances. Learning may be informal or formal, basic or advanced or learning from a training or research project. When teachers engage with other professional colleagues in a deliberate explanation of their professional world, they are learning. By reflecting on what they do, how they feel about it, how they would like it to be and then examining the details through interaction with professional colleagues, workplace learning takes place. As a result, better understanding is arrived at, decisions are made and plans for change are created that lead to instructional competence.

There is a need to analyze the teachers' learning in the workplace in order to bring about concrete evidences of what and how teachers learn. It is in this milieu that the study is conceived to find out various learning constructs of teachers including what they learned in the workplace, how learning took place and the sources of learning. The study also looked into the factors that motivated the teachers to learn in the workplace.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

The condition of teacher learning in the workplace is grounded on the theory of constructivism which rests on the notion that there is an innate drive to make sense of the world (Brook and Brooks, 1993). Instead of absorbing or passively receiving objective knowledge, learners actively construct knowledge by integrating new information and experiences into what they have previously come to understand, revising and reinterpreting old knowledge in order to reconcile it with the new. Researches on how people learn in the workplace demonstrate that what is taking place is constructivist, situated learning (Billet, 1996). The concept of situated learning that knowledge is corrected and made meaningful by the context in which it is acquired is embedded in constructivism. In the informal setting in the workplace, effective learning resulted from the learners' engagement in authentic activities guided by experts and interacting with other learners. The teachers as learners need a variety of opportunities to immerse themselves in rich learning experiences and construct new understanding of content and pedagogy. Activity is a key factor in knowledge construction and participation in everyday work activities "forces" learners to access higher-order procedural and propositional knowledge.

Research confirms that the focus in teaching and learning should be on the individual's active construction of knowledge (Stevenson, 1994). Although construction of knowledge is unique to each individual, it is shaped by the workplace learning culture. In the educational setting for example, the teachers who are considered adult learners prefer to learn things which are problem-centered for immediate application of knowledge rather than for future use. Adult learners value direct instruction only for information they are unlikely to learn without being made explicit. The workplace learning culture finds strength in Knowles theory of adult learning (1980). He advocates that the responsibility for learning is placed on the shoulders of the learners. The basic characteristic espoused by Knowles is the self-directedness of adult learners. As individual matures, the self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being. Adults accumulate a growing reservoir of experiences that becomes increasingly rich resources for learning. Knox (1980) supports Knowles in his proficiency theory of an adult's life situation. Adult learning is distinctive on the centrality of concurrent adult role performance. Proficiency in doing one's work in a given situation involves a combination of attitude, knowledge and skill. Knox theory posits that the purpose of adult learning is to enhance proficiency to improve performance. This is the reason why adults' time perspective is one of immediacy of application because they want to use their learning to solve a problem on hand to improve job performance. The desire to learn and enhance job efficiency is due to internal factors than external factors. This motivational orientation of adult is supported by the theory of Tough (in Cross, 1981). Tough and his colleagues build their model on the belief that the anticipated benefits to be derived from learning are present in the person's conscious mind and constitute a significant portion of the person's total motivation for learning. They claim that the learners' conscious anticipation of reward is more important than the subconscious forces or environmental forces. Their model consists of five stages at which benefits might be anticipated moving generally through (1) engaging in learning activity to (2) retaining the knowledge and skill to (3) applying the knowledge to (4) gaining a material reward and (5) gaining a symbolic reward.

The constructive theory and the adult learning theories of Knowles, Knox and Tough become the theoretical anchor for the study.

## **Methodology**

The study was a qualitative-quantitative research which employed checklists, story frames and interview schedule to delve deeper into the areas, sources of learning and learning processes of teachers.

Six workplaces from higher education institutions in the Philippines were selected for the purpose of the study. The selection of multiple school sites was done because of the desire to investigate the dynamics of different school types and location as workplaces of teachers. The researcher believed that no single school site would have accurate information of the diversity of teachers' learnings.

The respondents or teacher informants were selected following the within-case sampling. Miles and Huberman (1994:29) indicated that "within case sampling is almost always nested." However, choice of informants, narrative accounts and interview responses were being driven by conceptual questions, not by a concern for representation. For every workplace, six teachers were selected based on their length of experience, their willingness to be informants of the study and the researcher's rapport with him/her in order to ensure full cooperation in the data gathering stage. The teacher informants were classified as expert, mid-career, and novice teachers (Sikes, 1985) based on their length of teaching experience. The grouping was made to determine the learning of teachers among diversified experience which was perceived to be a potent factor in the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Learning Constructs of Teacher Educators**

#### ***Areas of Learning***

The study identified concepts and skills that teacher educators learned in the workplace. The learning areas were categorized as **teaching concepts/skills, manipulative skills, leadership concepts/skills and human relationship skills**. The data collated showed that more than one half of the concepts and skills were learned by teacher educators in the workplace. This means that the workplaces were fertile grounds for learning. The teachers learned a lot in their places of work aside for the knowledge acquired formally in their graduate and undergraduate studies.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the teachers in the workplace learned first and foremost the **professional concepts and skills** necessary for job performance and competence. These concepts and skills included teaching strategies learned to effect learning among students. The skills on the art of questioning, and classroom management were also acquired as teachers carried out their lessons everyday. New assessment methods, grading system, and test construction were also learned by the teacher educators. An educator in her 60's said : *"Though my age is near retirement, I have never grown tired of teaching. I enjoyed the challenges and disappointments that go with teaching. I have learned so many things in the university like the new concepts and strategies in teaching, the changing role*

*of an educator, lesson planning and art of questioning. When H.E majors come to me, they know very little of home economics. But after my course, my students said they learned many things from me. It is indeed very rewarding.*” The second most learned area in the workplace was on **human relationship skills**. The development of wholesome relationship with peers and students was cultivated in the workplace. The respondents claimed that it was in the workplace where they learned to relate well with others. One teacher shared: *“When you are a neophyte in the university, some of the teachers are skeptical about you. They doubt your capacity to teach and they test your ability to get along with them. So you have to prove your worth. You have to be respectful and let them feel that you can learn a lot from those ahead of experience. Once I was very late for my class. I didn’t mind those people whom I met because I was in a hurry to go to my class. The following day, talked reached my ears that I didn’t have respect for old teachers since I did not bother to greet them at the corridor. After that incident, I realized that I became more respectful than I was as a student”*.

The workplace was a rich venue for values development as most of the teachers learned to cultivate harmonious interpersonal relations with superiors, parents, the public officials , non- governmental organization and the people in the community. One educator said: *It is in my workplace that I have learned to be human. The extension project that I participated has taught me life’s lessons outside the four walls of the classroom. When you share something to the needy and the deprived, the satisfaction that you feel is beyond compare. In my institution, I have learned the values of empathy, compassion and care.*” The finding supports Downs (in Panares, 1998) claims that learning at work is largely a social activity, and everyone has a role to play in helping people learn. Kelly further avers that every individual needs the building of people to learn better human relations. The third learned area was on the **leadership concepts/skills** which included coordinating school activities, facilitating meetings, advising an organization and representing the school in outside activities. *“Once I was assigned to coordinate the College Foundation Week. I was hesitant to accept because of the great responsibility. Later I was glad I accepted it because it honed my leadership skills. It’s the most challenging assignment I ever had.”* Teachers learned least the **manipulative skills** like making instructional materials, making bulletin boards, homemaking skills and letter cutting which were not expected of college teachers master. The finding supports Knowles(1980) theory on adult learning which states that adults prefer to learn things for immediate application of knowledge. The immediacy of application in college teaching is lesser in the manipulative skills compared to the professional concepts and skills which are of immediate use in the teaching learning process.

## Sources of Learning

The sources of learning in the workplace were also identified. Most of the teachers in College used **self-reflection** as a source of learning. This means that as they hurdled their daily work as teachers, they reflected on their experiences and learned significantly from those. One educator shared : *“I faced my class very much prepared for the new lesson. Then one student stood up asking a question about last meeting’s discussion. Many students followed. I got irritated because my day’s objectives were not carried. After the class, I reflected on my reaction. Then it dawned on me that I got angry because I was not prepared to answer their questions and I was in a hurry to finish the coverage of the course. However, I realized that questions are opportunities for learning. So I need not be angry or defensive when students question. From then on, I look forward to every lesson as an opportunity to learn from students’ responses and queries.”* It was also revealed in the study that the teacher educators valued **printed materials** as second source of learning. They gained better insights of their profession and improved their teaching through the ideas and insights gained from books and journals. The third source of learning for the teacher educators came from their **co - teachers**. According to Watkins (1996) the teacher can learn a lot from co-educators or reference groups. Reference groups are needed which would help teachers work-out and maintain their own professional goals and standards. It was further revealed that the fourth source of learning came from **in-service trainings**. Teachers learned from the seminars and trainings they attended. *“I was sent to a summer training upon the recommendation of my dean. I learned how to improve my teaching at the same time acquired the leadership skills necessary for the job. When I arrived from the training, I was made to train my colleagues. It was difficult. I thought I couldn’t tackle the job. Every training session that followed was learning experience for me considering the comments and suggestions of my colleagues. From the experience, I developed mastery and self-confidence. I feel great about myself.”* It was further revealed in the study that novice teachers benefitted most from trainings and seminars. The **administrators** were considered as the fifth source of learning. The teachers gained insights from the input of administrators. Most of the teachers considered **students** as reservoir of knowledge , thus the least source of learning.

## Process of Learning

How teachers learned at work drew upon their experiences, motivation and reflection. The study looked into the learning processes of teacher educators classified as **reflected, incidental, active, and self-motivated**.

It was revealed in the study that teacher educators employed first and foremost the **reflected learning process**. This means that teachers used reflection that led to relevant learning in the workplace. Most of the teachers were reflective learners as they gained insights on the day to day episodes in the workplace through self-reflection. Geranmayek (1992) opines that teachers must be able to reflect on and decide between multiple alternative approaches to instruction to effectively teach. Schon (1987) concurs that reflection can provide the “bridge” from an educator’s technical knowledge to instructional competence. It was also revealed that the **self-motivated learning** process ranked second. It means that teachers learned because of their intrinsic desire to learn. Teacher educators were self-motivated learners. They engaged in learning because they wanted to learn. The teachers’ internal motivation to improve and become better as persons and educators was evident as they continued to learn furthermore in the workplace. As adults face new learning challenges, they learn not so much of extrinsic factors but rather to find fulfillment in what they are doing. The third learning process employed by teachers was the **active learning**. The teacher educators actively involved themselves in the events in the workplaces and learned from them. They tried out innovative and progressive ideas in their classes. In the learning environment, adults often learn more by taking an active role. Watkins and Marsick (1993) believe that a learning workplace affords the individuals more opportunity for active participation. The teacher educators experienced **incidental learning** which was not planned but incidentally happened. Events in the workplaces provided opportunities for incidental learning like nutrition month which enabled teachers to learn cooking skills or new sports mastered in the conduct of university intramurals.

Generally, the teacher educators used different learning processes in order to make sense of the events around them. As they immersed into the kaleidoscope of experiences in their workplaces, they became **reflective, self-motivated and active learners**.

### **Learning constructs based on length of teaching experience**

The teacher educators were grouped according to teaching experience. Their learning constructs revealed the following:

On the **areas of learning**, the novice teachers who had 1-9 years teaching experience had the least percentage of acquisition of learning in terms of teaching, manipulative and leadership concepts and skills. The mid-career teachers who had teaching experience from 10-19 years acquired more concepts in the workplace.. The expert teachers who had twenty years of teaching experience and above acquired most the **teaching , manipulative, leadership concepts and skills as well as the human**

**relationship skills.** The data suggested that as you grow in experience you also grow in wisdom. As Reyes in Hamak (2000) pointed out that experience makes a person more knowledgeable, more effective and more innovative. This further proved that teaching experience is a significant factor in the acquisition knowledge (Cross, 1981). Through the years, those teachers ahead in experience accumulated more professional knowledge and skills that were significant in job performance.

The **sources of learning** of teachers based on the length of teaching experience were also considered. The novice teachers primarily got their learning from their co-teachers followed by self-reflection and in-service training. The teachers in the mid-career sourced their learning from the printed materials , from self-reflection and from in-service training. The expert teachers got their learning from self-reflection and printed materials. In-service training was not a dominant source of learning for expert teachers. The finding could have implications on the in-service training as a professional development activity for teachers. It was evident in the study that those who benefited most from trainings and seminars were the novice and mid-career teachers.

On the **process of learning**, the novice teachers dominantly employed both the reflected and the self-motivated learning process. The mid-career dominantly used the reflected learning, while the expert teachers employed the reflected and the self-motivated learning process. Generally, the **novice, mid-career and expert teacher educators** learned most of the concepts and skills via **reflection, self-motivation and active experimentation**. The finding affirmed Gines (1991) assertion that meaningfulness of material (which could be attained through reflection and active experimentation) and the motivation to learn are the key factors that affect the learning of adults. It was further revealed in the finding that the number of novice, mid-career and expert teachers who employed the reflected learning process was comparable. This clearly implies that adults are capable of self-reflection. Though self-reflection is enhanced with experience, the novice teachers with less years of teaching experience also employed self-reflection to create meaning of the significant events in the workplace.

### **Factors that motivated teachers to learn**

When an individual interacts with the members of his work group, he brings with him his motives, perception, culture and personality. To understand an individual's performance, direction and persistence of action, it is important to know his motivation (Mison, 1996; p. 109).

This study looked into the factors that motivated the teacher educators to learn in their places of work. To answer such concern, the

researcher gave out questionnaires and interviewed the teacher respondents. The questionnaire enabled the respondents to write the factors that motivated them to learn while the interview explored the respondents’ free ranging thoughts about learning. Both methods reinforced one another.

An analysis of the data revealed that the teacher educators did not differ in their motivational factors for learning. The teachers among the workplaces identified similar factors that motivated them to learn like the salary, benefits, sense of achievement, recognition and many more. Probing further into the data showed that the emergent factors for motivation could be classified as extrinsic and intrinsic.

Display 1 contained the factors that motivated the teacher educators to learn in their places of work.

Display 1 Factors that Motivated the Teacher Educators to Learn in the Workplace

<b>Extrinsic Factors</b>	<b>Intrinsic Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- salary, incentives,</li> <li>- promotion</li> <li>- administrators</li> <li>- new responsibility, assignments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sincere dedication and commitment to promote learning among students</li> <li>-professional growth</li> <li>-self-worth, self improvement, sense of pride</li> <li>-personal fulfillment, satisfaction</li> <li>-sense of achievement, recognition</li> </ul>

It was evident in display 1 that some teachers learned for specific rewards of learning effort and other educators learned for the sake of learning, for self-improvement and personal desire to learn. These two motivations account for what might be termed “**extrinsic**” and “**intrinsic**” factors for learning (Cross, 1981; p.96). Some of the extrinsic factors that motivated the teachers to learn and become effective were the **increase in salary, incentives, and promotion in academic rank**. According to some teachers, they were motivated to learn and search for excellence so they could enjoy the above-mentioned benefits. One teacher said: “*I tried to learn the intricacies of my job so I could get a promotion.*” Herzberg in Mison (1996) averred that these factors are important to prevent dissatisfaction in the job. Other teachers claimed that they continued to learn because the **administrators** had high expectations on them. In one interview, the teacher said that in their institution, they ought to learn the intricacies of teaching because they’re expected to contribute something beneficial. The culture of excellence of the institution moved them to continue learning and keep abreast with the latest trend in the profession. Some educators divulged that the **new responsibility and teaching assignments** challenged them to continue learning.

Aside from the external factors, internal factors were dominant as motivators for learning. Most of the teachers articulated that their pursuit for

learning was due to their **sincere dedication and commitment to promote learning among students**. They tried to master current methodologies since they wanted to lead their students to the noble mission of teaching. Another factor for learning was **professional growth**. Some educators wanted to learn because of their desire to become effective teachers. One educator attested that the quest for learning should be lifelong to perfect one's teaching craft. Another intrinsic factors evident in display 1 were **self-worth, self-improvement and sense of pride**. Being knowledgeable in one's field increased the person's worth and self-esteem. Some teachers said that *when you are learned, others regard you highly. Colleagues praise and like you and you feel a sense of pride when regarded highly by peers*.

The finding on teachers' motivation for learning revealed that most of the factors for learning were intrinsic than extrinsic. This is supported by Knox theory that the adult's desire to learn and enhance job efficiency is due to internal factors than external ones. As adults face new challenges, they learn not so much of extrinsic factors but rather to find fulfillment in life.

## **Conclusion**

The workplace is a rich avenue for learning wherein the teacher educators acquire the professional concepts/skills and the human relationship skills necessary for effective practice. It is in the workplace where teachers are confronted with practical situations. They reflect and do something about the situation, thereby learn something from it. The teachers' stories and narratives are embodiment of the accounts of their lives as educators. These stories reflect teachers' learnings, insights and realizations as they continuously make sense of the reality in the workplace. Various factors affect teachers' motivation for learning in the workplace. Though some of the teachers are motivated to learn for some extrinsic rewards, most adults give pragmatic and self-motivating factors for learning.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Intensify activities that promote learning in the workplace like informal sharing and collaborative learning groups where teachers could reflect on their practices and experiences.
2. In-service training should be grounded on teachers' needs. Emphasis should shift from outside consultants to in-house experts to facilitate the training.
3. Mentoring should be institutionalized in colleges and universities to allow the transfer of wisdom from experienced practitioners to novice teachers.

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