

# Teaching as Service in Knowledge Work

Betsy Joy B. Tan

College of Education, Silliman University

Effective schools literature is already replete with theories on the indispensable partnership between teachers and students. However, the literature on knowledge as the reality and truth of such partnership has not been acknowledged as assertively as the ownership of land, the wealth in the Agricultural Age; and the ownership of capital, the wealth in the Industrial Age. This paper asserts that ownership of knowledge as the wealth in today's Knowledge Age has not been emphasized in many classrooms particularly in the Philippines where a) vulnerable knowledge work situations may result because of a mismatch between knowledge gained in school and essential knowledge for job entry; b) mass media such as television greatly impacts the society; and c) content specialists teaching in tertiary institutions may not have the needed training in teacher education. Moreover, this paper discusses how this concern may be addressed by a school's teacher evaluation program, and in this context identifies the roles and the rights of the school and the teacher in helping create an environment where knowledge work is effectively and efficiently facilitated.

## THE ESSENCE OF KNOWLEDGE WORK

Management maven Peter Drucker (1975) coined the term 'knowledge work', and reiterated that

knowledge work by definition does not result in a product. It results in a contribution of knowledge to somebody else. The output of the knowledge worker always becomes somebody else's input.... Knowledge work, therefore, needs far better design precisely because it cannot be designed *for* the worker. It can be designed only *by* the worker.

Drucker further posits that since knowledge work is thinking, of significant interest to schools as the knowledge organization where both teacher and students meet as knowledge workers is the fact that

the results can only “be seen by projecting backward from the needed end results.

In such definition, Drucker also points out the intricate and complex design of classroom teaching as service when the precise point of convergence between the knowledge work of the teacher and the knowledge work of the learner become less clear because of the nature of its intangibility.

Furthermore, when knowledge as IQ or intelligence quotient is perceived as a peripheral concern in the teaching-learning process, such subliminal attention nurtures the formation of attitudes and values that make up one’s emotional quotient (EQ). This creates vulnerable knowledge work situations where a mismatch between knowledge gained in school and essential knowledge for job entry may occur. In the Philippines, such situations are also felt in the country’s brain drain—including employment practices of career demotions when teachers work as domestic helpers and doctors become nurses in foreign job postings. When schools open themselves to ‘second coursers’—like doctors enrolled in nursing schools—this attitude of career demotion is reinforced. Such educational events are symptomatic of what Goleman (1995) describes as the scientific model of the emotional mind as “far quicker than the rational mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing. Its quickness precludes the deliberate, analytic reflection that is the hallmark of the thinking mind.”

When teaching is service

There are many professional service careers—in the medical and allied fields, in law, engineering, management, teaching, media, governance and public service—to name a few, but nowhere is the problem of service more profound and pronounced than in teaching. Perhaps this is so because all professional careers start from the knowledge work of teachers. This poses a great challenge in counties like the Philippines, where the country’s Department of Education had to institute drastic reforms in its grading and instructional delivery systems as studies consistently showed students’ poor performance in important basic education subjects such as English, Mathematics, and the Sciences. In fact, the ranking of the Philippines in Math and Science in the 1999 and 2003 Trends in International Math and Science Survey (TIMMS) was consistently low. In the 1991 TIMMS, the Philippines ranked 36th of 38 countries whose eighth graders (2nd year high school students)

were tested both in Science and Mathematics. In the 2003 TIMMS for Grade 4 pupils, the Philippines ranked 23rd in both Science and Math among 25 countries; and 41st and 42nd in the TIMMS for second year high school students (National Education Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education).

Among service careers, nowhere is the task and responsibility of service more elusive than in knowledge work. Perhaps this is so because the result of teaching service is knowledge that is unseen and intangible (Lovelock, 1991). In this regard, planning an instructional design is difficult enough; but what is more challenging is plotting the degree of certainty in the delivery of instruction when the teaching has sparked any learning, if at all. Moreover, in the interactive situation of knowledge work in the classroom, it is difficult as well to ascertain when the learner's physical brain has become a thinking mind.

#### Handicap in knowledge work

Thinking is learning. In the human anatomy where knowledge is received, sorted, stored, and retrieved, studies about the brain have only been more intensive in recent years. In teacher education colleges, teacher training emphasizes teaching methodologies and strategies in the delivery of knowledge—a commodity that is invisible to the teacher's trained eye. However, how teachers and students process and connect the dots to form another chain of knowledge is seldom explored when it is also true that the teacher's processing of knowledge seldom converges with how his or her students process the same. Moreover, not all teachers undergo teacher training. Among those who teach tertiary students, teachers are content-specialists in the subjects that they teach so that the design of their delivery of instruction often becomes incidental to their teaching repertoire.

The same teachers are also learners themselves. In tertiary education where the government requires them to earn a master's degree, their advanced professional training involves more specialization in the subjects that they teach but not on how to deliver what they teach. Without the benefit of teacher training, feeding the learner's brain is then given more attention than serving the learner's mind—the essence of service in teaching.

Defined as 'errors in thinking' or 'thought impediments,' Francis Bacon in Titus et al. (1979), identified in his classic treatise "Idols of the Mind" a basic handicap among teachers as knowledge workers. Other scientific papers that emphasized a learner's inability

to think clearly were also published thereafter. This includes the bestseller by Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence, Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (1995).

But teachers are accountable for their teaching performance, where the ideal balance is both content and delivery of instruction. A teacher's self-directed program on how to teach are, however, seldom recognized as significant components of teaching as service. As the recent experience in the Philippine public education system shows, the teacher's self-knowledge of accountability to the learner is never connected to classroom performance as teaching service.

An employee is one who has an employer. In teaching therefore, every employee's performance becomes a management responsibility. However much a teacher claims responsibility for his or her own actions because his or her job is a highly individuated form of professional service in a classroom where he or she is his/her own executive, teaching performance is subject to review. As a management task, the teacher then cannot perform teaching service apart from the organization or institution where he/she belongs. Performance and accountability for such performance in the service of teaching are therefore the teacher's responsibilities both to the students and to the school he/she has chosen to serve.

### Teaching as service

As learning is a brain activity, without a doubt, teaching must focus on nurturing classroom climates for knowledge work to flourish. Among others, Arends (1994) identifies distinctive classrooms as an environment where

students feel positive about themselves, their peers, and the classroom as a group; . . . they do not only feel satisfied but (also) persist with academic tasks and work in cooperative ways with the teacher and other students; . . . norms support high student involvement in academic work; . . . teachers find ways to maximize the time devoted to academic learning.

Schools distinguish themselves through excellence in their teaching; but, just like any organization that is run as a business, the creation of distinctive service, the service edge, is a willful management act (Zemke & Schaaf, 1989). It is only in this management perspective that teacher performance can be accounted for as teachers deliver their responsibility of creating "powerful learners" (Joyce & Weil, 1996). In the organization where the business is the cultivation of each mind in

a teaching-learning situation, such decision is a purposeful management task that deals with operating policies affecting people. For this deliberate action, management performance review for employees who are teachers then takes the form of teacher evaluation. This is not only a key activity for the school's management but also the load-bearing part of the organizational structure (Drucker, 1975). However, teachers also have their own personal and professional standards that are consequently affected by the broader standards of the organization where they have chosen to belong. As such, schools become vulnerable to losing sight of its vision when teacher evaluation as an instrument of quality control is not given adequate and competent attention.

Service is a deed, an act, or a performance where one of its distinctive characteristics is intangibility (Loveloek, 1991). In this kind of knowledge work, a selfless kind of service is given more significance to the point where a teacher carries on or off campus the mission, vision, and values of his/her school. Integrity is then both personal and professional in teaching as knowledge work. For human effectiveness in the teacher's career, there are also certain principles of the profession, one of which is the principle of service—the idea of making a contribution that complements another principle, the principle of quality or excellence (Covey, 1989). When service is a principle, there is also a set of habits that works towards contributing to the advantage of another. For the teacher, these are his or her students.

As a principled knowledge worker where the service requires the nurturance of value-laden habits, the opposite would simply overturn those basic principles. To illustrate, these teachers' lives are revealing:

Teacher Kate is now in her third year of teaching. She was not trained to be one, but just drifted into it for lack of better work opportunities when she wanted to fit her computer studies into a career. In public places in school like the faculty room, she can be loud and candid – never monitoring her thoughts before she opens her mouth. Her classes are also noisy places. Although she is trying to earn her graduate degree, she loves to shock both her colleagues and students with stories about how she spends the end of her school day by hanging out with friends. And in spite of her graduate school classes during weekends, she follows the same routine.

Teacher Ruby was trained in hotel and restaurant management. For the past three years, she has been a faculty member of the management program at the College of Business Administration. Last year, she earned her master's degree in management from a prominent state university. This semester, it took her some time to find money

for enrollment in another graduate program - this time in English. She is articulate and socially well-adjusted. Her appreciation and appetite for learning look never-ending; but her excitement about life and her teaching can be contaminating.

Sporting a pony tail and an earring, Teacher Paul breezes into his first period class at ten-thirty in the morning. Although he has been late for more than 15 minutes, his students are still waiting for him. He opens his book to begin the class and reads. This is how he conducts his class.

Self-mastery in knowledge work

The domain of service for teachers is the brain; but even a synoptic scenario of these teachers' habits reveals that such domain is never in their consciousness. For as long as they are in their classrooms to pass on to their students what they know, that is the sum of their teaching performance.

Habits are the external manifestations of one's state of mind and emotions. In knowledge work, they also serve as points in a scale to gauge what one's priorities in life are. Habits therefore, are the behavioral patterns of how a teacher's cognition functions in the exercise of his or her discernment skills about what, how, and why one teaches. With these habits, it is evident that creating the service teaching advantage of developing the physical brain into a thinking mind has never been a priority among Kate, Ruby and Paul.

### THE TEACHER AS EXECUTIVE

The teacher is a classroom executive (Arends, 1994). Whenever he or she performs his or her job as a knowledge worker, he or she necessarily finds him/herself in a public communication situation, being the sole source of the message and with many "publics"—learners as receivers who represent various homes where they have already formed their habits and attitudes about life and living. As the main source of the message in the transaction of knowledge between teacher and learners, the role of classroom leadership looms large in the teacher's career horizon.

The knowledge manager

As the classroom executive, the teacher also functions as knowledge manager where basic issues such as the lesson's pace, sequence, and emphasis—all within an allotted classroom timeframe—become

management concerns for both the teacher and his or her supervisor. Within such walls, the classroom leader also assumes the core functions of management like planning, organizing, controlling, communicating, and implementing the day's knowledge focus. Included in such plans is how teacher expertise can be structured for delivery in the confines of the classroom. Upon this structuring of knowledge by the teacher also hinges how learners receive, sort, store, and retrieve the same knowledge. As knowledge manager, the teacher allows learning to happen where learner achievement rests on one's ability to connect and create meaning from what has been received, sorted, and stored. It is the teacher who facilitates and directs the knowledge path that the students take. It is also the inspiration from a teacher that motivates students to create and innovate otherwise uncharted seas of knowledge that have never been connected before. Thus, without the teacher's structural presentation of knowledge, learning becomes an emotional exercise in confusion and distortion.

The central mission of schools

Achievement in the classroom is the aim of every learner. For the future of their own careers, the conditions of the moment in the classroom foster that sense of achievement. This also provides that chain of continuity for their careers and those in the succeeding generations, including the country where such professions are exercised. Unless the teacher regards classroom accountability as the measure of one's own performance, one's ability to transform the physical brain into a thinking mind stays elusive and the country's survival, a perennial dream.

Classroom performance is the life center of any educational organization when every teacher is self-aware—through understanding, and in the extent to which one is capable of checking oneself in knowledge work. In the central mission of schools, such metacognition—our ability to touch base with ourselves and assess whether we are still attuned to the central mission of schools—fuels the knowledge worker's cultivation of human thought (Joyce et al., 1983).

### **KNOWLEDGE WORK AS SERVICE**

Many dots have to be connected before the creativity of a person can be kindled and eventually, be born. And among other service

institutions in society, it is the formal knowledge work in school that transports such creativity from teachers who in turn, ignite the passion to be creative among their students. Indeed, the service of teaching is not only a demanding profession because of the conditions for creativity to flourish in the classroom but also because the nature of instructional decisions—addressed to invisible and intangible thinking processes—are just as demanding. For anyone who wants to learn in order to teach or to teach in order to learn, teaching as a career move cannot merely be a casual decision but should instead be a result of deep reflection (Arends, 1994).

### Quality control in knowledge work

In school, teacher evaluation is the tool that helps teachers help their students. This is so because as a monitoring aide for teacher performance, it specifically brings to light classroom events and learning processes directed at the domain of teaching, the mind. With the purpose of helping to define and sharpen teaching skills at the precise moment when instructional decisions are executed, teacher evaluation may enhance the creativity of both the teacher and his or her students.

Teaching is a job that also demands constant thinking on one's feet, a process of knowing and monitoring one's own thinking known as metacognition (Joyce & Weil, 1996). With a system for teacher evaluation in place, schools are assured that their teachers who think at higher levels are the catalysts for a classroom full of students who are high achievers, more cooperative, and better problem-solvers. The school then has the responsibility of seeing to it that quality control procedures in each classroom are applied and maintained. It is also the school that creates the conditions for excellent teacher performance, a state of being that is integral to the school's vision and mission.

In the contemporary environment of technology, it is also teacher evaluation that helps to rein in influencing factors outside of the classroom. Media is easily a contender with school teachers in its desire to capture the attention of every learner—a point of handicap for any knowledge worker. This unequal attention radiated from two sources of learning, media and the classroom, inevitably tips the balance in favor of media personalities over the classroom teacher because of the former's entertainment bias. And because learning preferences and habits are highly personal decisions, a teacher or school that cannot differentiate between the effortless learning picked up from media and



the heavier requirements of thinking in knowledge work also sends the signal that the trivia that media dishes out is more important in life than the learning in school.

Often invented for its entertainment value, it is a fact that media inspires comfort, indolence, and inactivity. Given the often trivial content in their work, media practitioners as knowledge workers condition people to a life of entertainment and mental inertia. From its various sources of communication, metacognition then cannot happen in media. A good example is the producer or the scriptwriter who regularly dishes out program fare that stunts ideation, the thinking process of idea generation. When mass communications like radio, television, or the movie industry present fixtures like sensationalized newscasts, formula-prescribed and dubbed soap operas, drama re-runs or inane dedication programs, entertainment has graduated into a way of life that deadens one's senses—including the critical ability to discriminate as well as the higher level thinking skills involved in problem-solving. With the third generation of mobile phones where soap opera is another feature, the culture of entertainment is certain to affect learning and schools.

By the very nature of autonomy given to the teacher in the classroom, this inability to distinguish media as a competitor in catching the students' attention is certain to drive the wedge between the school's vision and primary reason for being and the teacher's philosophy of teaching as a service professional. It is through teacher evaluation, however, that quality control in knowledge work creates the cutting edge that set one knowledge organization from another.

#### Environmental psychology in knowledge work

In designing instructional goals, both the school manager and the teacher have to keep in mind that the ability of their students to discriminate between what is important and what is not, is a defining characteristic of intelligence. The opposite is simply "irrational exuberance," a term in behavioral economics that impacts on teaching-learning relationships (Shiller, 2000). For instance, the teacher's inability to recognize media as a competitor for the student's attention is not only an utter disregard for the probative pursuit of creativity in instruction but also a downfall of the school's reason for being.

As shapers of the collective destiny of a country, perhaps no other knowledge workers among service professionals exercise more influence on their students—and eventually the collective identity of

a nation—than media practitioners in both print and broadcast. Teachers in Schools of Mass Communication then have to perform their knowledge work not merely from the knowledge structure of entertainment and information dissemination but instead design learning structures from the Drucker (1975) framework of knowledge work. In a country like the Philippines where neither Media Literacy nor Emotional Intelligence is a part of the curriculum, the knowledge work for future journalists and broadcasters is not merely a problem solving task but also a social responsibility of the conscience.

Thus, schools need to help teachers preserve its primary responsibility, the education of a nation's citizenry. A program in teacher evaluation is the school's system for holding each one accountable in the knowledge community—the students, the teachers, and the management.

### THE BILL OF RIGHTS IN KNOWLEDGE WORK

As schools strive for quality control in knowledge work, an excellent guide for reviewing educational practices can be arrived at by examining the rights of both the educational institution and the teachers (Strike & Bull, 1981).

#### The rights of the school

Rights of the school are classified into four: the right to exercise supervision and to make personnel decisions intended to improve the quality of the education they provide; the right to collect information relevant to their supervisory and evaluative roles; the right to act on such relevant information in the best interest of the students whom they seek to educate; and the right to the cooperation of the teaching staff in implementing and executing a fair and effective system of quality control in knowledge work through evaluation.

#### The Rights of teachers

The rights of teachers include professional, evidential, procedural, and other humanitarian, and civil rights. Professional rights are the right to reasonable job security; the right to a reasonable degree of professional discretion in the performance of their jobs; and the right to reasonable participation in decisions concerning both the professional and employment-related dimensions of their jobs.

Evidential rights in the knowledge work of teachers include the right to have decisions made on the basis of evidence; the right to be evaluated on relevant criteria; and the right not to be evaluated on the basis of hearsay, rumor, or unchecked complaints.

Their procedural rights are the following: the right to be evaluated according to general, public, and comprehensible standards; the right to notice as to when they will be evaluated; the right to know the results of their evaluation; the right to express a reaction in a meaningful way to the results of their evaluation; the right to a statement of the reasons for any action taken in their cases; the right to appeal adverse decisions and to have their views considered by a competent and unbiased authority; and the right to orderly and timely evaluation.

For other humanitarian and civil rights, teachers have the right to humane evaluation procedures; the right to have their evaluation kept private and confidential; the right to evaluation procedures which are not intrusive into their private lives; the right to have evaluation not be used coercively to obtain aims external to the legitimate purposes of evaluation; the right to nondiscriminatory criteria and procedures; the right not to have their evaluation used to sanction the expression of unpopular views; and the right to an overall assessment of their performance that is frank, honest, and consistent.

Where there is an acceptance of the major functions of evaluation as a quality control measure in knowledge work, an effective and successful teacher evaluation system is the ultimate outcome in every knowledge organization.

### A POSTSCRIPT

In knowledge work, it is then incumbent on the school to create a counter revolution, to nurture among its various stakeholders the value of teaching as service—for schools are born because of a basic need for formal training among people so that they can take care of themselves, their families, and their worlds. In the service of teaching-learning, the school is the only organizational structure for purposeful knowledge work that cultivates the delicate creative balance between teacher satisfaction and student achievement. After *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), Dr. Howard Gardner published *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (2004), where he not only presented an indictment of the world's teaching-learning profile but also pointed out that the absence