Author  Lim, Yian Hoon
Title  Blended learning in a higher education institutional context: Applying *phronēsis* in educational change
Institute  Thesis (Ph.D.) National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University
Year  2019
Abstract

With an increasing number of tertiary institutions adopting blended learning to support deep and meaningful learning among students, a need exists to study teachers’ active effort to learn or agency during such courses. Given the paucity of research in this area, my research is a mixed-methods case study that traces course changes and parallel growth in agency among three tertiary-level teachers over a three-year period in a new blended instruction organic chemistry course in Singapore. I adopted an ongoing stance of phronēsis (φρόνησις)—Aristotle’s prime intellectual virtue—when I used the results from quantitative methods of inquiry (e.g., statistical analyses of students’ achievement scores, demographic data, course evaluation surveys) about the course to catalyse reflection and change among the teachers that I worked with. As well, through the use of qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, participant observation, documentary and artifact analyses) I described occurrences of teacher agency as they navigated the complex process of educational change in their institution seen in their capacity to make choices, take principled action, and enact change both in the course and in the practices of the Singapore Tertiary Institute. Phronēsis or practical wisdom was appropriated as far as possible throughout my dealings—as a critical friend and educational guide—with these teachers as it is sensitive to contexts and can be used to harness personal competence, experience, and judgment to empower others to solve problems. Teacher agency was largely realised here through my provision of formative course evaluation data that was neither easily accessible nor understood by these teachers as well as during multiple joint curriculum deliberations concerning the course. Adopting such a moral-ethical standpoint in educational change research was, therefore, more satisfying than typical expert-driven approaches apart from the greater potential to
enlarge teachers’ agency in this manner. This study contributes to our knowledge of educational interventions in higher education in Singapore where an extreme paucity exists. More specifically, it illustrates how the application of *phronēsis* can motivate teacher enactment of their professional agency in their various work-related identities as well as the prioritisation of “co-construction” of program implementation that balances theory and practice.

Key words: case study, blended learning, *phronēsis*, tertiary education, teacher agency