

ADAPTIVE EXPERTIZE AMONG YOUNG TEACHERS

Lect. PhD CRISTINA NANU
Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918” din Alba Iulia

Abstract: *The main concepts connected to adaptive expertize are flexibility, ability to innovate, efficiency, continuous learning, seeking out challenges and creativity (Carbonell, Stalmeijer, Könings, Segers, & van Merriënboer, 2014; Opre, 2015). Following the idea that professional expertize develops on a continuum and there is not such a thing as novice and experts in a field, Anthony and his colleagues (2015) propose the distinction between routine and adaptive expertize as a component of professionalism. The aim of the present article is to describe the construct of adaptive expertize in the teaching profession and the first shifts in the development of adaptive expertize among young teachers. Best training characteristics fostering the development of adaptive expertize as well as the impact of professional communities are also addressed.*

Keywords: *adaptive expertize, routine expertize, young teachers;*

When thinking about what an expert is, the common belief is that an expert has to have both knowledge and experience and to be able to successfully integrate the two to solve problems at workplace in an efficient, adaptive and creative way. Reed, De Arment, and Wetzel (2012) defined expertize as a psychosocial construct with following dimensions: adaptive dispositions (inclination toward learning rather than merely applying knowledge, willingness to work at limits of one's knowledge and skills, willing to replace prior knowledge and assumptions) metacognitive skills (monitoring own learning, seeking and analyzing feedback, monitoring results and performance) and cognitive skills (cognitive flexibility, data-driven forward reasoning). Very common among employers is the belief that freshly graduated students do not have the needed skills and expertize to be successful in their working place. By their lack of trust they are pointing out that school fails to prepare graduates for effective adjustment to workplace. In this context, a deep understanding of the development of professional expertize is highly needed for designing educational programs that foster the development of expertize in both school and workplace.

1. What is adaptive expertize?

There are many studies that differentiate between novice and experts in terms of types of knowledge and skills, personality traits and characteristics of learning tasks and learning environment that promotes the development of expertize (see review Carbonell, Stalmeijer, Könings, Segers, & van Merriënboer, 2014). The main idea that comes out from this systematic review is that expertize has a strong domain specific component. Among general meta-cognitive skills and motivation

as predictors of adaptive expertise, only self-efficacy was a common finding across different studies. The content of the knowledge and skills was rather similar between experts and novice. However, experts seem to consistently be superior in their knowledge representation. The body of knowledge of experts is less context-dependent, more abstract and therefore more flexible and at hand when new situations occur.

Regarding the characteristics of best training programs, it seems that developing responsibility for own learning and learning from errors are key components that favor the development of expertise (Carbonell et al., 2014). In a literature review about workplace learning, Tynjälä (2013) pointed out that professional expertise develops on a continuum, suggesting that the dichotomy novice/expert might not be appropriate to characterize the complexity of expertise development. The authors propose that professional expertise consists on highly integrated theoretical, practical, self-regulative and socio-cultural knowledge. This perspective opens up the possibility of designing educational programs that foster the development of expertise starting from school.

2. Teaching expertise – a component of professionalism

In the teaching profession, expertise is considered to be skillful balancing of varied content and pedagogical knowledge alongside “consideration of the contingency of pedagogical relations connected to the embodiment of both teachers and students, and of the sociocultural context of a classroom” (Griffiths, 2013, pp. 223 cited by Anthony, Hunter, & Hunter, 2015). Following the idea that professional expertise develops on a continuum and there is not such a thing as novice and experts in a field, Anthony and his colleagues propose the distinction between routine and adaptive expertise as a component of professionalism. The dichotomy routine / adaptive expertise focuses on the process through which people advance in their professional expertise. While routine experts have fluent and efficient skills and routines, adaptive experts are innovative, flexible, creative, and able to reconsider values and routines to respond to atypical situations (Anthony et al., 2015). The authors point toward few shifts that are illustrative for the development of adaptive expertise among prospective teachers. A first big step is considered to be the shift from self to students. It is very common among beginning teachers to focus on questions such as *How should I develop good lessons? How could I get better in my teaching? How could I survive my first school year?* It is always “I” both during planning time and during teaching time. Despite continuous effort in improving the teaching, these teachers rarely determine their students to learn better. There are at least two aspects that could explain this lack of effect. Constant feedback from students and the diversity of students are important for teachers to consider when regulating teaching strategies. This kind of information is likely to be missed by a teacher that focusses too much on own teaching behavior thus ignoring students behavior. Second, if a teacher changes often the format of teaching activities hoping to find a better recipe, this creates an unpredictable environment for students with negative effects on learning. As a

consequence, despite high efforts to improve, these kind of teachers obtain opposite effect translated in poor learning and behavior problems. Once, the teacher becomes confident about own knowledge and teaching skills, attentional resources are available to be redirected toward students. Shifting the focus from self to students, opens up a new area: students` diversity. Students have different backgrounds and learn in different ways. The construction of knowledge is the result of the interaction between teacher, students and parents. It is a community of learners and involves sharing in all directions. A teacher should be flexible enough to respond to in situ challenges while working with students. This is considered by Anthony and his colleagues (2015) the second big shift in the development of teaching expertise. Teachers understand that no matter how accessible the content is thought, learning does not occur if the student doesn` t take responsibility for own learning and if the home and school community are not connected.

3. How to support the development of adaptive expertize among young teachers?

Going back to what adaptive expertize is and what really matters in terms of components of this construct (see first paragraph), teachers should benefit from having abstract and flexible knowledge representation, high self-effyoungcacy and environments that foster teachers` autonomy. Once entering the working field, teachers are somehow in need to find ways to improve because otherwise students and community usually react and penalize the teacher. The question is how to empower a young teacher to already start developing teaching expertize. In the systematic review conducted by Bohle Carbonell and colleagues (2014), it was shown that the following tasks and training characteristics seem to favor the development of adaptive expertize: unguided exploratory learning, error encouragement frame, emotional control strategies, autonomy, transformational leadership and management support. One learning tool highly available is reflection. It increases knowledge and understanding. It develops autonomy and enhances self-perceived competence (Tynjälä et al., 2013). Using it as a research tool, Anthony et al. (2015) illustrated above mentioned shifts among prospective teachers. One teacher said: “My own self confidence has been a challenge, and I've found just in the small things that we've done, working out the problem and anticipating what they might do, has been really good to allay those fears that I have about whether I have enough knowledge.” (Anthony et al., 2015, pp 112) therefore shifting from focusing on self to focusing on teachers. This tool is valuable among beginning teachers not just because its obvious benefits at the general level but also because these teachers can benefit from sharing their reflections with the community of beginning teachers and their mentors. These communities of young teachers and their mentors create better learning environment settings compared to school communities where those teachers work. The trust might be much higher compared to real working places where a teacher feels a strong need to be accepted and might filter the information shared with the others.

4. When professional communities do not foster the development of adaptive expertise

Few years ago, an interesting case has polarised headlines. The so called “Turda teacher case” brought forward a symptomatic situation that happens when a teacher does something out of the usual routine. Why was this a scandal-wrapped case? A teacher (female), very passionate about her job and kept in high regard by her students, was (and still is) an influential teacher in the region. Her field: literature. What more harmless field could there be? The lesson: Symbolist poets. What a beautiful and uneventful lesson that should have been, one could easily argue. Well, not quite. As any gifted, open minded teacher, she went the extra mile, out of routine imposed by textbooks. So she simply recommended a (very good) film on this topic, hoping the students will adhere more thoroughly to the symbolist topic. So far, so good. Some (teenager) students watched the film. However, one parent noticed a certain scene in the film featuring homosexual content. He filed a complaint, the school administration had to admit the film was not part of the approved curriculum and they turned in reprimand to the teacher who consequently sought media’s attention. There are cultural reasons that can explain the reaction of the parent. Romania is still reluctant to anything LGBT related. However, homosexuality is not illegal in the country. Unfortunately, the school management immediately tried to punish the teacher, rather than educate the parent who was out of line. Leadership is not only leading. It is also knowing when to let and support others develop their own expertise, or at least take initiative, push things in the right direction.

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