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Sabbatical experiences and beyond: Enrichment and integration in psychology research and education

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Abstract

Sophistications of research and education in psychology by using knowledges acquired in sabbatical leave is presented. Discussions and engagements were vibrant across laboratory meetings, academic discussions, seminar classes, and undergraduate lectures during sabbatical. The dynamic environment facilitated discussions on topics ranging from specific studies to research planning and educational methodologies. The author's visit to another institute further enriched understanding of global academic practices. Leveraging insights gained, the author streamlined research processes and refined teaching methodologies upon online lectures. This sabbatical journey not only enriched the author's academic pursuits but also contributed to the advancement of research and education at the home university.

Key words: sabbatical, teaching and learning, research, education, psychology

Period of sabbatical leave

The sabbatical leave period extended from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024. University of the Ryukyus, with which the author is affiliated, grants a year-long sabbatical after 7 years of affiliation.

Institution during sabbatical leave

The author was affiliated with the School of Psychology at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia during the sabbatical leave. UNSW comprises 7 faculties, 47 schools, 4 main campuses, 53 centres and institutes with over 63,232 students, 7,230 staff, and 334,000+ alumni (University of New South Wales, 2024a). The School of Psychology at UNSW is located in the Faculty of Science and has approximately 30 academic staff, 1,600 undergraduate students and 150 postgraduate students and members of the school study a diverse range of topics such as children's development of language and knowledge, how mood affects our social behaviour, bias in eyewitness testimony, the brain mechanisms underlying pleasure and pain, the effect of ageing and brain damage on memory, how the visual system perceives a three-dimensional world, and the causes and treatment of psychological disorders ranging from psychopathy to depression and post-traumatic stress (University of New South Wales, 2024b).

Internalisations of research and education at UNSW

The author's sabbatical objectives included integrating research and education at UNSW. Participation in laboratory meetings, academic discussions, seminar classes on anger and aggression, and undergraduate lectures provided valuable insights for enhancing the author's own lectures.

During laboratory meetings, the professor, postgraduate students, graduate students, and

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undergraduate students discussed about various topics on anger and aggression altogether. For example, the professor introduced an ongoing international project on anger and aggression, shared the latest achievements, and demonstrated how academic articles were written. Undergraduate students conducted experiments and questionnaire surveys with support from postgraduate and graduate students. Discussions focused on the requirements for scientific psychological studies and improving the presentation of research articles. Throughout all the discussions in the laboratory meeting, all the members discussed actively and freely regardless their positions, careers, and grades. This characteristic was same as the one that the author has experienced before at UNSW (Tanno, 2011, 2012a) and the author speculated that it improved academic achievements of the laboratory members.

Academic discussions with the professor and graduate students covered topics such as research planning, applying for research grants, managing tight submission deadlines for journal articles, and enhancing the effectiveness of university lectures. These discussions were held both formally and informally at the office rooms, cafes, bars, and restaurants inside and outside of the university. This mingling seemed beneficial as it made it possible for the author to get latest information on research and education.

In seminar classes, honours students, who were undergraduate students in an honours year which was an extra year of study in UNSW, presented critiques on psychology articles related to anger and aggression, followed by discussions guided by the professor. Some of the students were the members of the laboratory meeting described above. Throughout discussions in the seminar class, all the members discussed on academic points actively and freely as well as the laboratory meeting. The connection between the laboratory meetings and seminar classes helped students understand research on anger and aggression and provided a pathway to postgraduate research degrees.

At lectures for undergraduate students at the faculty of science, academic staff provided lectures. The author attended some of them by referring course outlines and learnt tips for own lectures. The lectures varied from introductory psychology to specific domain of psychology. The criteria of the attendance were the venue that was only held in a large auditorium and lecture hall and the maximum number of the attendants because it was assumed that the attendance of the author never be bothersome for both lecturers and students.

On another note, UNSW provided a week with hiatus so called “Recharge Week”. Specific information is as follow. “Recharge Week is about creating headspace for you and your colleagues, and aims to promote and prioritise the wellbeing of staff. During this week we encourage you to reduce meetings and emails, as much as is practicable, as a way of freeing up time to focus, plan and catch up on work. Recharge Week is still a working week, however with reduced email traffic and meetings. We also encourage staff to consider taking some annual leave during this week if possible (University of New South Wales, 2023).”

Visiting another institute

Visiting another institute, such as University of Taipei in Taiwan, was part of the author’s sabbatical leave objectives. University of the Ryukyus allowed academic staff to spend a flexible schedule in sabbatical leave, therefore, the author could visit another institute, University of Taipei in Taiwan, to meet up with academics and see how they make progress their research and education. Despite the short duration, the author fostered relationships with academics and

gained insights into research and education practices at the University of Taipei. The impressive things were that academic staff always communicated with each other in very good moods and the lecturer and the students in the class discussed actively.

Sophistications of research and education

The author leveraged knowledge acquired during the sabbatical leave to enhance research and education. Throughout the sabbatical leave, the author engaged in research in Sydney in Australia mainly, went back to Okinawa in Japan several times with shuttling these 2 cities, and visited Taipei in Taiwan by using short term trip. Despite sabbatical leave, it was necessary for the author to provide lectures towards undergraduate students at University of the Ryukyus, therefore, the author did some lectures using knowledges acquired by the internalisations. The author has been working on teaching and learning and educational methodologies at university (Tanno, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013).

At research, the author streamlined research processes, leading to more efficient project completion. At UNSW, academics worked systematically to improve their studies. The author clarified what and when all coworkers related to the author's project should do their own tasks. This clarification helped a coworker to collect data systematically, another coworker review the article quickly, and a research assistant input data efficiently and give feedbacks to the participants quickly. In short, the author could accomplish the project efficiently. The experience of the sabbatical leave served as motivation and contributed to these improvements.

At education, the author focused on refining teaching methods and instructional designs for introductory psychology courses with incorporating the experiences from UNSW. For example, all information was provided clearly. The author showed slides on the screen sufficiently long and explained in a clear voice. Also, the author provided information using the news related to media which seemingly students have in their daily lives. These tips were gained in the lectures which the author attended at UNSW.

In addition, the author showcased research environments, funding sources, and new discoveries. The author introduced how the frontier researchers (e.g. the professor) made progress on their research at UNSW. For example, during the online lecture using online meeting application, the research environments and equipment like buildings and testing rooms were showed, how much amount of funding by research councils were clarified showing web site, and newly discovered research were introduced referring the knowledge that academics shared with the author with keeping ethical concerns on confidentiality.

Online lectures included live views from Sydney landmarks and Taipei's current situation to maximise lecture attractiveness. The author conducted online lectures from Circular Quay and Rocks in Sydney in addition to the campus of UNSW by showing the live situation of the icons and showing some pictures of both cities of Sydney and Taipei aimed at inspiring students and fostering interest in studying abroad.

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