

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

As countries continue to compete in the global market for social and economic advantage, there is an increasing demand for higher education to provide work-ready graduates. To meet this demand, educators require innovative and manageable professional learning to keep up with current practices in their field. Morales and co-authors (2019) developed a self-rating tool to assess the proficiency of STEAM educators within the Philippines' higher education sector. There is potential for such tools to inform the development of open-access professional learning programs for all educators in higher education. These programs can be developed in other specialist teaching areas as a pathway to broad use of micro-credentials.

Traditionally, universities placed emphasis on classic longitudinal knowledge learning over relatively long timeframes. In contrast, a micro-credentials system provides opportunities for individuals to achieve small and measurable qualifications with these new skills and accomplishments being immediately recognized. In the context of competitive and evolving workplace, these training modules provide a cost-effective way for individuals to remain agile and current (Fong *et al.* 2016).

With a view to a competency-based approach to professional learning, educators also have opportunities to focus on fostering valuable skills in adult education such as the ability to cooperate, communicate, and problem-solve (Kouwenhoven 2009).

However, despite being well-suited for faculty development in higher education, micro-credential systems are surprisingly rare for faculty in higher education.

As an example, at our institution eight core teaching competencies have been identified – these form the basis of professional learning modules. Educators in our program are required to keep an ePortfolio with a record of professional practice linked to an individual teaching inquiry. Within each teaching competency, educators are guided to select their own proficiency level. If educators demonstrate that they are highly capable in an area, and they are able to provide evidence of their practice, they can receive credit for the module. When the educator self-identifies a gap, they are provided with a series of guided workshops and modules to provide the necessary skills.

These modules are organized around the concept of micro-credentials, but – similar to other institutes of higher education – we have not implemented a formal micro-credential system.

A new approach is required to motivate and document faculty professional development. The system introduced by Morales *et al.* (2019) could be applied to other professions and inform an assessment model for modularized micro-credentials in higher education. Educators are reminded that there is no one size fits all theory of adult learning and that this assessment tool could provide a simple approach to meeting an identified need in the professional development of faculty at institutes of higher education worldwide.

Lee-Anne Turton

Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland,
New Zealand
lturton@unitec.ac.nz

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Dear Editor,

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the issues raised in Dr. Turton's letter to the Editor. We attest and extend our appreciation for the ingenuity of the idea of how to extend the self-rating proficiency tool to reach the topography of professional learning and micro-credentialing.

In her letter to the editor, she expounds on the potential of the tool to propel open-access professional learning programs for educators at higher education, which may be developed in other specialist teaching area as a pathway to broad use of micro-credentialing. We appreciate and agree with the concept of assessing the professional educators' proficiency for micro-credentialing purposes. In fact, we also believe that micro-credentialing is an outstanding idea as a future of the proficiency indicator tool. This concept matches our vision of utilizing the tool to initiate up-skilling and reskilling strategies for the Philippine human resource for them to attain the required skill set of Teacher 4.0. Micro-credentialing as a professional learning system works on the principles of the personalized and self-directed system – focused on the needs, competency-based, and job-embedded system (Ryerse 2017) – which makes it practical aside from being in the short track compared to the long traditional macro-credentialing to earn a degree. In fact, most first world countries – specifically the United States – pursue the micro-credentialing track grounding on the belief that this system can expand choices for educators and administrators as they shape their formal professional development. The Digital Promise company, for example, successfully partnered with the Center for Teacher Quality and has been hosting the micro-credentialing system of nine states in its digital platform (DP 2017). The State University of New York (SUNY) initiated the same processes of skilling their entire populace clustering the micro-credentialing process as university-based, non-profit partnership with higher education, and for profit-offering for those in the industry (SUNY 2018).

As per Dr. Turton's claim, her institution has an informal micro-credentialing system. It maintains an ePortfolio with a record of professional practice linked to an individual teaching inquiry. Within each teaching competency, educators are guided to select their own proficiency levels. If high and with evidence, they receive credit for the module. If low, they identify the gap and are provided the necessary skills through modules organized around micro-credentialing principles. Relatively, many institutions of higher and advanced learning are already using micro-credentialing and issuances of digital badges for specific skills (*e.g.*, Arizona State University and the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee thru Digital Promise). In the realm of the fourth industrial revolution

era, digital badging flourished to reward achievement or acquisition of competencies fit for targeted 21st Century skills. In the graduate school of the National Center for Teacher Education, we engage our graduate students with the concept of certification, which basically resembles micro-credentialing. However, we follow a structure of completion of several courses for a graduate student to earn certification (*e.g.*, on pedagogy, assessment, curriculum) – which may not exactly mimic the goals of micro-credentialing as performance-based in nature. This system may need to have a surrogate framework to emphasize an authentic assessment of performance of teachers in the graduate school for micro-credentialing or certification purposes, in which the principle of self-assessment using a highly structured proficiency tool may come as an integral component of a micro-credentialing framework in teacher education, and even in teacher professional development programs. We envision such a system to highly improve teacher education graduates' skills towards the expert level, and bring in-service teachers to leap from one career stage to another until they seat on being distinguished teachers. The framework may also work its way to professional learning, and continuing professional development in other fields.

Seemingly, Dr. Turton foresees our proficiency tool as a new approach to inform the assessment framework of other teacher education and teacher professional development programs towards developing their unique micro-credentialing system in higher education. The tool is foreseen to provide a much simpler approach to meeting an identified need in the professional development of faculty at higher education institutes. In fact, the tool provides the ground and base of micro-credentialing as visualized by Dr. Turton. Needs assessment using a structured self-rating tool may play the prelude to micro-credentialing main processes of providing evidence to claimed skills. The tool may likewise serve as a validation system of the evidence presented in the micro-credentialing system. Finally, the tool may offer a framework of assessment and feedback mechanism. This means that a highly structured micro-credentialing framework may be sourced from the developed proficiency tool – to aim at and emphasize reskilling and up-skilling of our human resource to meet the required skills of the fourth industrial revolution era for confidence building. Ultimately, we agree with Dr. Turton that the tool may serve as a framework of a highly structured micro-credentialing system in all professional learning and in continuing professional development in all fields advocating quality through equity of skills and resources.

Marie Paz E. Morales

Publication Office, Philippine Normal University,
Manila 1000 Philippines
morales.mpe@pnu.edu.ph

Ruel A. Avilla

Faculty of Science, Technology and Mathematics
Philippine Normal University, Manila 1000 Philippines

Jovito C. Anito

Jose Rizal University, Mandaluyong 1552 Philippines

Caesar P. Palisoc

College of Graduate Studies and Teacher Education
Research
Philippine Normal University, Manila 1000 Philippines

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