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Thinking about a Stance on Approaches to “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession”

“Guarantee of Outcomes” and “Guarantee of Opportunities for Reflection”

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Full-scale implementation of “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession” from the second semester of 2013

In accordance with revision of the Enforcement Ordinance of the Education Personnel Certification Law in November 2008, all students enrolled in and after the 2010 academic year have become obligated to take “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession (Kyosyoku Jissen Ensyuu)” as a teaching subject. In the case of four-year universities, the policy will take effect beginning with the second semester of 2013. However, as in junior colleges, it has already been implemented at Hirosaki University and University of the Ryukyus as 2007 model projects for MEXT teacher education reform and at Hyogo University of Teacher Education and other universities as the 2008 advanced implementation.

Nonetheless, it is apparently not necessarily easy to organize and to implement the related contents and classes because the subject as a teaching subject has features that are not found in existing subjects available at universities. From the need to examine the subject from aspects of the “guarantee of outcomes” and the “guarantee of opportunities for reflection” that “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession” includes, herein we examine and comment practical problems.

Setting the subject as a “Grand sum” of teaching subjects = Making a “multilayer” of teaching subjects?

“Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession” was explained in a report of the Central Council for Education (July 11, 2006) as follows:

“(Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession is) a subject to confirm definitively whether qualifications and abilities that students have acquired through learning of some subjects in a teacher-training course and various activities were organically integrated into and formed as minimum

qualifications and abilities required for teachers in line with teachers model through which the university provides approval programs and the goals the university seeks to attain.”

Additionally in the Annex 1 of the report, it is explained that ‘in a sense, it is a subject to be positioned as a “Grand sum (generalization/reconfirmation) of learning trajectory” through all years at university.’ Student is “expected to become capable of starting their lives as a teacher more smoothly by “realizing what problems they face in becoming teachers in the future, making up for insufficient knowledge and skills as needed, and trying to establish them” (the point and aim of the subject).

That shows the “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession” differs from other subjects in terms of its twofold meaning. It is a compulsory subject to obtain a teaching certificate and also a subject to make a “Grand sum (generalization/reconfirmation)” of “qualifications and abilities that students have acquired through learning of other subjects in a teacher-training course and various activities”. One might say that the multilayered constructive principle of subjects was introduced into teaching subjects. For teacher-training faculties and universities where the completion of teaching subjects is a requirement for graduation from university, it has been a subject with a much heavier meaning (approval or denial of graduation). In the preceding cases, it is the case that the “diploma policy in a teacher-training course” at universities is layered with the goals of “Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession” to be attained. How do, or can we make such subject with a special “heaviness” be substantive? For students and university staffs in charge of classes, creating a common understanding of that “heaviness” is an important challenge.

(Cont'd on page 3)

Introduction of a new guest scholar

Curriculum Center for Teachers has the privilege of having Professor Chen Xin from Northeast Normal University as a Visiting Associate Professor of 2012 fiscal year since December. He will study the quality assurance of teacher education at our center until next May.

In 1996, I started my academic career as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of International and Comparative Education at Northeast Normal University (hereafter NENU) after I obtained a master degree in education at NENU. In 2005, I earned my Ph.D. in education at the Graduate School of Education, Hiroshima University, supported by the Japanese Government Scholarship. At present, I am working at the Faculty of Education, NENU as an Associate Professor.

I have mainly been conducting comparative studies on higher education. During the doctoral program, I studied undergraduate curriculum reform in China from a comparative and historical perspective. Concretely, I examined the principles and characteristics of curriculum reforms in the following four periods, Soviet-imitation period, Great Cultural Revolution period, Four-modernization period, and Market-economy-transition period, and characterized them as different curriculum types.

One project that I have conducted in recent years is an "international comparative study about accountability system in higher education." With a focus on the higher education in the U.S., the U.K., Netherlands and Australia, I and my partners have examined the ideas of accountability, investigated the historical development of accountability, analyzed the structure and functions of accountability system, and elucidated the similarities and differences among the nations. The other project is "a comparative study of liberal education in universities of Japan and China." Liberal education has been a topic drawing increasing global attention in higher education and a focus for higher education reform in Japan and China respectively. However, in terms of curriculum development in liberal education, the orientations of Japan and China might be contradictory. It is important to clarify the principles, characteristics, and problems of each country's liberal education through critical comparisons on a number of aspects, such as historical development and current conditions, theories and practices, and so on.

As one faculty member of NENU, one of



whose major missions is teacher education, I have recently been interested in the professional development of teacher educators. The quality of teacher educators is key to the improvement of teacher education and training. Through the cooperation with members of the International Collaborative Research Project on Quality Assurance in University-based Teacher Education in East Asia, I wish I could advance the research related to the professional development of teacher educators.

In addition, I have been the Associate Dean in charge of international exchanges at the Faculty of Education, NENU since this April. I would like to take this chance to further the academic and educational exchanges between Tokyo Gakugei University and NENU.

Finally, I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for having provided the opportunity of Visiting Associate Professor to me. This presents a new challenge to me. I will do my best to fulfill my roles and responsibilities. Thank you for your advice and support.

Chen Xin, Ph.D
Northeast Normal University

*(Cont'd from page 1)***Course registration chart = Standardization or Normalization of making a learning history?**

From the aspect of a "Grand sum (generalization/reconfirmation) of learning trajectory", a new learning support system, in which each student views and reflects the learning content of teaching subjects as a whole and prepares opportunities to explore possibilities and problems as teachers, is needed as a device for making "Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession" a substantive subject. The system is the setting for media, such as a course registration chart (*rishu karte*) and a portfolio, and for interviews using them. We must set what contents should be included in the course registration chart and a portfolio and how and when to use them. Speaking in greater detail, when we say a "Grand sum" of "qualifications and abilities that students have acquired through learning of other subjects in a teacher-training course and various activities", the following issues for examination come to mind: What to do about 1) the extent of each student's "learning trajectory" (the extent of teaching subjects at university, the extent of all subjects to be taken at university, and the extent of self-directed learning and experience); 2) the evaluation method used for them (not only critical remarks, but also with or without comments on students' learning status and its notation method); 3) how to reflect students' self-evaluation; and 4) how to use the data in the learning process after entering university (e.g. interviewing students). It might be the case that the more such a system becomes fully equipped and elaborated, the greater standardization or normalization of making one's "own learning history" might occur. When looking at such a state from the outside, a "compulsion for reflection"-like function will come to mind. As pointed out by Prof. Takahiro Endo of University of Fukui at a research topic session in the 2012 meeting of National Association for the Study of Educational Methods, this point appears to be an important issue for examination.

Multiple teachers in charge and a guarantee of diverse opportunities for reflection

In other words, the challenge exists of how we guarantee the content and quality of students' "opportunities for (self-) reflection". Regarding the aim of "Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession", when we mention "— become capable of starting their lives as being teachers more smoothly by realizing what problems they confront in becoming teachers in the future, making up for insufficient knowledge and skills as needed, and trying to establish" (report of 2006), it seems to suggest "supplementary guidance" (report of 2006) for insufficient parts strongly, as indicated with the underlined parts (which were added by the author). It can be called a "defect model"-like teacher education theory. How are the "supplementary guidance"-like education theory and the image of "ever-learning teachers" (report of the Central Council for Education on August 28, 2012), "teachers are those who have an inquisitive mind and keep on learning", connected in a consistent manner? We must ask this question radically.

At the same time, questions to ask ourselves are also becoming readily apparent. In the "Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession", for which staffs in charge of specialized subjects and those in charge of teaching subjects are assumed to "cooperate" and have responsibility, we must confront difficult problems ahead: how we make a connection with students' individual learning, encourage extraction of challenges, and form an attitude to explore their own challenges after becoming teachers, not taking a stance that each staff in charge of classes supplements "insufficient parts" in class. Furthermore, when making and managing not necessarily large class contents, through so-called "cooperation", we will be questioned as to how we reconstruct the content of education and research that we have cultivated as researchers and seekers in this scene. How can we exercise multiple knowledge and wisdom of "specialization (analysis) and generalization (synthesis)" which we have cultivated as a researcher and seeker? This seems to be the point that demands the closest consideration.

Terminology of Teacher Education

Teacher as a lifelong learner

Regarding the "policies for developing teachers' total competence throughout the teachers' career" by the Central Council of Education (August 28, 2012), which are intended to raise the level of teacher training education to that of a master's degree, it is notable that they enshrine "teachers as lifelong learners" (constantly updating knowledge and skills throughout the whole teaching career) on that basis. In this Central Council of Education, to grasp teachers' training before and after becoming a teacher, a special session as well as a previous teachers' pre-service training session was set up for discussion.

Regarding pedagogical studies in Japan, getting rid of the means to distinguish pre-service teacher training from in-service teacher training, it was not until the 1980s that a comprehensive survey of "teacher education" could be taken. Additionally in China, almost simultaneously, a tendency to understand "teacher education" throughout both normal education and continuous education was seen. These policies by the Central Council of Education might show a gap of about 30 years necessary for research tendencies to be reflected in policies. (Yasuyuki Iwata)

Book Review

Masashi Tsujimoto, Yuan Zhenguo, Hirota Nanbu and Gao Xia (eds.)
Japan's Education of the East Asian Era: Dialogue with China (in Japanese)
(Kyoto Daigaku Gakujyutu Shuppankai, 2012)

Li Zang
Tokai University Junior College
Visiting Professor, Curriculum Center for Teachers

As a comparative study of modern education's problems, joint research by the Graduate School of Education, Kyoto University (Japan) and the National Institute of Education Sciences (China) are attracting attention. Different from common research joint topics exclusively introducing each country's circumstances and characteristics, this book, focusing on Japan's education, in which the Chinese perspective is first discussed from its own standpoint and then the side of Japan answers it, places value on "dialogue," combining discussions of researchers of both countries. As for teacher education, both sides are premised on ensuring the high-level teacher training and qualities. On the other hand, whereas the Chinese side is practice-oriented, focusing on Japan's recent policies such as a graduate school for teaching profession aimed at higher education and practical power and license renewal systems to ensure teachers' total competency, the Japanese side emphasizes "learning of a profession," which takes top priority in ensuring public benefits in education and values the accumulation of knowledge and technology by cooperation and affiliation between universities and educational sites and the evaluation and certification of teachers' ability to respond to civil society through competitive principles. Characteristics such as discussion dependent on "dialogue" between both sides are interesting.

Sites Where Teachers Are Nurtured

Yoko Yamasaki (Professor, PhD)
Mukogawa Women's University

Head of Department of Education, Graduate School of Letters,
Deputy Head of Undergraduate Department of Education

The department of education to which I belong is a large department providing for 1078 undergraduate students (27 faculties), together with 311 students in the department of pre-school education of our affiliated junior college (12 faculties), and 17 graduate students, as of May 2012. Our constant challenge therefore is to ensure detailed learning. However, our students' "interest, motivation and attitude" in becoming teachers are very good and their volunteer spirit for society is also notably high. These characteristics, combined with an education practice-oriented curriculum, have helped send many female teachers into schools (the actual number of successful applicants for 2012 fiscal year elementary teacher examination is 90). Considering that graduates from private universities account for fewer than 60%, and female graduates for more than 60%, of elementary school teachers in Japan, educating and training so many female elementary teachers entails a great social responsibility, imposing a heavy burden on academics in charge of both research and professional preparation.

What should be recalled here is the meaning of teacher training in higher educational institutes. In my view the key criteria in conferring Bachelor of Education degrees are the following: (1) to acknowledge the fundamental dignity of 'human beings' who have developed language, culture and science; (2) for them to understand our own and other nations historically and socially; (3) on that basis, to express in their mother tongue what they feel, hear, question, and think precisely in "matters and circumstances around education (or pedagogy)"; (4) to have an ability to identify issues for critical examination and to discuss and describe them logically. Included in this process is a discussion of the politics of education, ideologies and attitudes, and opportunities for educational change and development. Discipline and logical thinking for social change are important especially in these years of global expansion.

Our university drew up a declaration for educational

advancement, education of women with autonomy, rationality, and practical skills and dispositions for work. We therefore aim to send independent and confident students out into society, so that the educational outcomes of my department lie in independent logical thinking by individuals. In this sense, we hope to avoid accepting uncritically the recent trend that places excessive emphasis on "educational practice" as it is. Indeed, a survey of graduates (25 sophomore teachers of elementary schools, in a project commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan) has revealed high satisfaction with skill practice and practical training in college, but identified problems in systematic comprehension of lesson content across subject disciplines and especially in offering instruction in moral education or special activities. Incidentally, 25 mid-career teachers pointed out the importance of their knowledge of educational philosophy and principles, looking retrospectively at their undergraduate years. In addition, 25 principals of elementary schools looked to the teacher training curriculum to developed social understanding and knowledge that is the preserve of higher educational institutes. These research results, well worth our careful attention, might suggest a new orientation for departmental reform.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, the department of education, identifying such development as a pressing issue, seeks reform that is conducive to "improving teachers' overall competence" by affiliation and cooperation between teacher-training university and boards of education. Affiliation and cooperation count because sites in which students grow into teachers and the sites, in which teachers grow further in intellectual and professional development, are closely and inseparably connected and continuous. This fact is confirmed in a report stating that the "awareness of mid-career teachers is developed further through joint activity with new and aspiring teachers" ("Teacher Training Model Program" at Mukogawa Women's University sponsored by Japan National Center for Teacher's Development in 2012). In other words, to enjoy a life of well-being as a teacher, it is necessary to maintain an environment in which teachers can continue to learn and explore issues with junior colleagues. In the future, we anticipate continuing departmental reforms acknowledging and implementing these principles.

Rescheduled Date for the 13th Annual Symposium

New date: Saturday, January 12, 2013

Venue: Room N411, Koganei Campus,
Tokyo Gakugei University

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