

## 'Experience' and 'Reflection' on Teacher Education Curricula in Japan

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### I. Recent School Affairs and Two Major Principals of Postwar Japan

#### 1-1: Establishment of Two Major Principals

It is well known that education reform in Japan after World War II has been led by occupation army from the U.S. and two major principals for teachers' pre-service education have been established as 'Pre-service Education at Universities' and 'Open System for Teachers' License'.

'Pre-service Education at Universities' was established to conquer the criticism against former systems of teachers' pre-service education provided by Normal Schools for primary school teachers (higher secondary education level until 1943, and post-secondary education level since 1943) and Advanced Normal Schools for secondary school teachers (post-secondary education or junior college level). Normal Schools and Advanced Normal Schools were the institutes of less than university (Bachelor) level, and their course-of study were strictly regulated and controlled by the Government with such as 'Items for Normal School Education' (*Shihan-gakkou-kyouju-youmoku*). In addition, they were separated from other institutes, colleges and universities of higher education in Japan and they have few academic freedom. Therefore, the criticism were made after the WWII against these Normal Schools and the teachers graduated from them that teachers from old-fashioned pre-service education system did not have enough competency and academic wisdom to study and deal with various problems by herself/himself.

The other principal 'Open System for Teachers' License' means that not only the specialized institutes such as former Normal Schools or Advanced Normal Schools but also any higher education institutes can provide teachers' pre-service education and qualify the teachers' license when they meet the certain requirement by the Government. This principal is a solution for the lack of qualified teachers for primary and secondary schools. Since only 56 Normal Schools and 7 Advanced Normal Schools (at 1949) could not meet the demand of teachers, there were some alternative ways such as 'Certification by Examination' or 'Certification without Examination' (graduates from some approved institutes have a priority to get certification of secondary school teachers' license with only their document's inspection). Moreover, there were certain

amounts of teachers without any license or certificate. Another aim of 'Open System' is get teachers from various academic backgrounds besides the specialized institutes for teacher education.

So there major principals are the way to improve both teachers' quality and quantity. In fact, 84.5% of primary school teachers have BA or higher degree on 2001, and 1,411 institutes (universities, junior colleges, graduate schools, etc.) on 2007 can provide teachers' pre-service education and qualify the teachers' license.

Anyway, these major principals have had some defects from the beginning, and some changes that could not be realized then have occurred after they have established. So there has been a severe mismatch between the two major principals 'Pre-service Education at Universities' 'Open System for Teachers' License' and the aim to educate teachers with enough competencies for various school affairs in recent Japan. Thus, education reform in Japan these years can be recognized as an attempt to seek the solution for the mismatch.

#### 1-2: 'Escape from Learning' – School Affairs after 1970s

Compulsory education in Japan has postponed from 6 years to 9 years including the lower secondary education (junior high schools) from 1947 by School Education Act. And, though the upper secondary education (senior high schools) is not compulsory, the enrollment rate has come up to more than 80% at 1970s, so senior high schools have been recognized as 'semi-compulsory'. These changes have great merits to broaden the chance to learn at secondary schools and raise the people's general knowledge, but new junior high schools and senior high schools have to take care of the students with less motivation for learning than before, as a result. Former secondary schools were not compulsory and they had entrance examination to select the students with enough motivation for learning, but many reluctant students have to enter the new types of secondary schools after they have been systemized.

This problem has not been recognized at the beginning, but the new types of school affairs have occurred gradually since 1970s. On 1971, the Central Council of Education (*Chuo-kyouiku-shingikai*, an advisory committee for the Minister of Education) has reported about these changes on secondary education as 'Junior high school as compulsory and senior high schools with more than 80% enrollment have different problems for leading students' behavior from those of former secondary schools' and the committee concluded about the new requirement for teachers that 'Well-trained teachers are needed for leading students with various talents, abilities and motivations'.

What the committee said as 'different problems for leading students' means the school affairs so-called 'Escape from Learning' – not the problems about 'learning', but the problems before 'learning' such as bullying (*Ijime*), truancy, 'classroom collapse' and students' behavior against the law.

To grow up the competency for these new types of schools affairs, the

traditional organization of university (with 'Faculties' or 'Departments' divided by each academic field similar to each school subject) is not suitable because academic discipline does not mean the training for teachers' competency. But, after the report of the Central Council of Education shown above, no re-examination has been made to the principal 'Pre-service Education at Universities' itself, while only partial amendments have been made about the teacher education in Japan.

### 1-3: Populated Higher Education and Teacher Education

Higher education in Japan has been remarkably populated after WWII and the enrollment rate for universities (4 years) and junior colleges (2 years) has come up to 20% at 1960s and 51.5% at 2005. In addition, most of these higher education institutes have their own courses approved for teachers' licenses (79.8% of 4-years universities and 71.8% of 2-years junior colleges on 2007), so total supply of teachers' licenses is constantly overflowing the demands. For example, 172,219 licenses have been issued for elementary, junior high, senior high and special school teachers on 2004 while 19,565 teachers have been recruited at municipal elementary, junior high, senior high and special schools on 2004. This oversupply may cause at least two problems as follows.

First problem is about the lack of prestige of teachers' licenses and license holders due to the oversupply. The number of issued licenses on 2004 '172,219' is more than 10% of 22-years old (usual age of graduation from 4-years university) population about 1,520 thousands. Therefore, many students' parents have teachers' licenses though they are not working as teachers. In addition, each higher education institute has own criteria and no nation-wide standard have been set up, so the people does not pay respects for the value of teachers' licenses.

Second, the principle 'Open System for Teachers' License' has become a difficulty to improve the teacher education program in nation-wide. Education Personnel Certification Law (*Kyouiku-shokuin-menkyohou*) requires the minimum credit for teaching practice as 4 credits for elementary and junior high school teachers and 2 credits for senior high school teachers (1 credit equals 30-45 hours practice). These minimum requirements seem to be lower than global standard, but it is difficult to add more credits for teaching practice. Actually, the phenomenon called 'Teaching Practice Pollution' has occurred because too many student trainees do their teaching practice at elementary, junior high, senior high schools and so on, while few of them get the job as school teachers. So extra program related to school may mean the additional damage for students who have to tear with the less-skilled lessons provided by student trainees.

These problems have some effects upon the trends on teacher education reform in Japan as follows.

## II. Trends on Teacher Education Reform in Japan

## 2-1: Two Ways for Reforming Teacher Education

The opinions on teacher education reform in recent Japan has come from the low dignity of teachers trained under the two major principals 'Pre-service Education at Universities' and 'Open System for Teachers' Licenses'. But, two conflicting ways are asserted as solutions for these problems as follows, thus there has been confusion about teacher education reform in Japan in recent years.

From one point of view, present systems of teachers' license and pre-service education are not effective anymore, so it would be better to seek the solution in the alternative way of recruiting new types of human resources to educational fields than to improve present systems. This opinion has mainly been asserted by Prime Minister's side. For example, Government's Council for Promotion of Regulatory Reform and Private Sector Opening (*Kisei-kaikaku-minkan-kaihou-suishin-kaigi*) since 2003 (renamed as 'Council for Regulatory Reform' on 2007) has strongly insisted that present teachers' license system is not effective, and has recommended the promotion of 'Special License' for teachers (issued by Prefectural Board of Education for the persons without any pre-service education at higher education institutes). This opinion has been followed by Education Rebuilding Council (*Kyouiku-saisei-kaigi*) of Cabinet since 2006 as the Council's 1<sup>st</sup> Report on January 2007 says that 'At least 20% of newly recruited teachers' should be from these alternative ways.

From the other point of view, people's trust upon teachers' licenses should be regained by improving the present systems of teachers' pre-service education and licensing. This opinion has mainly been asserted by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, reorganized former Ministry of Education since 2001) and the Central Council of Education, its advisory group. Recent policies for promoting teachers' competencies can be recognized as improving plans for present teacher education system, such as reinforcement of the standards for the approved course of the institutes to certify teachers' licenses, raise the requirements for teachers' license, competitive funding for the institutes with approved courses for teachers' licenses, introduction of the renewal system for teachers' license, innovation of the in-service training for teachers, creation of 'Professional Graduate School of Education' (*Kyoshoku-daigakuin*) a new type of professional graduate school (Master level) for skilled teachers, and so on.

These two conflicting opinions have caused confusion on recent policy plans. For example, Government's Council for Promotion of Regulatory Reform and Private Sector Opening has contained the MEXT's plan for the establishment of 'Professional Graduate Schools of Education' as creating a new kind of regulation for new-comers, and the Council insisted that teachers graduated from these new kind of professional schools must not have any priorities. As a result, there are no systematic relations between the professional degrees of education (M.Ed.) from these new graduate schools and the conditions on licenses, certificates and employments of teachers with M.Ed. degrees. This situation has a strong effect upon the identities of these graduate schools

and the incentives of the graduates.

It is important to pay attention to the situation above as the background of curricula reforms of teacher education at the universities in Japan.

## 2-2: Requirements for More 'Practical' Curricula

Many arguments have been made since 1970s when the school affairs called 'Escape from learning' have occurred, that present systems and contents of universities have been too 'academic' to educate teachers with enough practical competencies and reforms have been needed to change the situation. Among them, the reports of the Committee for the Future Status of National Universities and Faculties of Education (*Kokuritsuno-kyouinyouseikei-daigaku-gakubuno-arikatani-kansuru-kondankai*) since 2000 have a strong effect upon the trends on curricula reform of teacher education in recent years. The Committee has made considerations on many aspects of the structure and curricula of universities and faculties of education (former Normal Schools), and the lack of 'practical' curricula has radically been criticized such as the low proportion of university staffs with teaching experiences at elementary, junior high and senior high schools (22.8% at May 1999) for teachers' pre-service education course. Final report of the Committee has recommended that universities providing pre-service education should 'collaborate with school fields' to 'educate teachers with enough practical competencies for dealing properly with various school affairs' and has pointed that pre-service teacher education curricula at undergraduate level has a conflict between 'so-called "academicians" (who think academic discipline is the most important factor to be a teacher) and "educationists" (who think special ability and skills are the most important factor to be a teacher)' so 'there can be little consensus about teacher education curricula and each university staff has own way of teaching students', then the final report recommends to consider the 'model curriculum' for teacher education.

After this report, curriculum reform of pre-service teacher education has turned to emphasize the collaboration between universities and school fields, and to build up the common curriculum model.

## 2-3: Teacher Education Reform among the Higher Education Reform

Concerning on the higher education reform in Japan after the 1990s, deregulation and creation of competitive environment have been promoted among the populated and universalized universities.

On 1991, the Standard for Establishing Universities (*Daigaku-secchi-kijun*) has been generalized and regulated frame of undergraduate course such as 'liberal arts subjects' 'specialized subjects' has been abolished, so each university has got more freedom of curriculum management than before. After the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, plans of competitive funding such as 'Center of Excellence (COE)' or 'Good Practice (GP)' have been introduced. In addition, every national university in Japan has been turned into 'National University Corporation' since 2004 and presidents have got wider

freedom of budget, personnel, and so on. For Teacher Education Courses (teachers' license is required to graduate) at the universities and faculties of education, total amount of student has been limited and controlled by the Ministry until March 2005, this policy has been deregulated.

Among these competitive environments with deregulation, it is difficult to maintain the pre-service education at universities. Growth in quantity of higher education in Japan is no longer expectable, and declining birth rate in Japan will reduce the demand of teachers at a long range. So it has become difficult for each university to emphasize teacher education in general. Therefore, some universities have made a decision to cut off or reduce the teacher education course they had, and other universities such as the universities and faculties of education (former Normal Schools, with little selling point other than to provide pre-service teacher education) have to seek their way of survival in appealing their own unique program for teacher education. 'Good Practice for Teacher Education' plan since 2005 (competitive funding for all the institutes with approved course for teachers' license) accelerates the situation.

#### 2-4: Requirements for 'Quality Assurance' for Teacher Education

Moreover, the requirements for 'Quality Assurance' for universities as teacher education provider are now getting severer than before. The requirements for 'Quality Assurance' of teacher education have come from two trends as follows.

One has come from the aim to improve the quality of teachers' talents and competencies under the two major principals 'Pre-service Education at Universities' and 'Open System for Teachers' License', and it is necessary to clarify the minimum standard of newly recruited teachers. As shown in the 2006 Report of the Central Council of Education 'On Teachers' Pre-service Education and Licensing System to the Future', the Council's recommendation such as reinforcement of student guidance of learning, creation of a new subject 'Practical Seminar for Teaching Profession' (*Kyoshoku-jissen-enshuu*, a subject aiming to make sure about the skills and competencies of teachers' candidates at their graduate, that will be obliged from freshmen on 2010) comes from the context of 'innovation of teachers' quality'.

The other has come from the trend on higher education in general. Since most of the academic fields have solid goal and criteria for BA degree, certain way of 'Quality Assurance' is necessary for the universities and faculties of education for pre-service teacher education.

From these two conflicting requirements of 'Professional Standard' (to secure the teachers' professional competencies) and 'Academic Standard' (for the quality assurance as an academic field of education), 'Quality Assurance' for teacher education is required with a little confusion.

### III. 'Experience' and 'Reflection' Model and Its Problems

### 3-1: Proposal of 'Model-Core Curriculum' Project of J.A.U.E.

As shown above, the final report of the Committee for the Future Status of National Universities and Faculties of Education has pointed the lack of 'model curriculum' of teachers' pre-service education and recommended 'some consideration about curriculum model is necessary by Japan Association of Universities of Education (J.A.U.E.)'. J.A.U.E. was established on 1949 as a nation-wide association of universities and faculties of education (former Normal Schools). When the final report has been published, J.A.U.E. has organized 'Model-Core Curriculum' project team and, after 2 and half years consideration, the project published a final report and recommended 'Proposal on Creating Curricula with "Core Subjects for Teacher Education" as their core'. The project says the close relationship between various 'Experience' at educational fields and the chances for scientific 'Reflection' is crucial to creating teacher pre-service education curricula at universities. In addition, the project recommends the collaboration among teacher educators for the lap between 'Experience' and 'Reflection' to work actually.

As a background of the project's recommendation of the lap between 'Experience' and 'Reflection' and collaboration among teacher educators, there has been a certain regret or criticism against the lack of common image of teacher education curricula caused by the miscommunication between the staffs who emphasize 'Experience' and those who emphasize academic wisdom or knowledge, and against the lack of the unification among the programs with 'Experience' in teacher education curricula.

The reasons why the project has not shown any itemized goal as in the other fields of higher education (mainly on natural science such as medicine, pharmacy or technology) are so complicated Japanese teachers' license system and the deregulation of higher education. In Japan, there are only one kind of license for medical doctor and one kind of license for pharmacist, while there are more than 100 kinds of teachers' license depend on each academic basis (undergraduate diploma at junior college, Bachelor at university and Master at graduate school), each type of school (kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, special schools and so on), and each subject for junior and senior high school teacher. So it is quite difficult to show each itemized goal for all the licenses for teachers. In addition, after the generalization of the standards, each university has wider range of choice to arrange the curriculum, so each university has its own way of setting the subjects required by Education Personnel Certification Law. Moreover, 1998 amendment of Education Personnel Certification Law has allowed the certain amount of 'subjects for education or school subjects' besides previous categories of 'subjects for education' and 'subjects for school subjects'.

In these circumstances, the project has made its final report as a proposal for the way of creating curricula for teacher education and tried to meet the Committee for the Future Status of National Universities and Faculties of Education's requirement of

‘curriculum model for teacher education’.

### 3-2: Evolution of ‘Experience’ and ‘Reflection’ Program

At the same time when the J.A.U.E. ‘Model-Core Curriculum’ project has published the final report on 2004, some universities with high motivation for teachers’ pre-service education curricula have started the curriculum reform with ‘Experience’ and ‘Reflection’ program as follows.

One example is the approach of improving teaching practice program and setting up the chances to ‘Reflect’ the ‘Experience’ at schools, such as Shinshu University, Faculty of Education. Teaching practice programs of the faculty contain ‘Basic Teaching Practice’ (for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, 4 credits) and ‘Advanced teaching Practice’ (for 4<sup>th</sup> year students, 4 credits) at attached schools. From 2005, two subjects have been added in advance the teaching practice as ‘Clinical Education Basic’ (for 1<sup>st</sup> year student, 2 credits: an observation at attached schools) and ‘Clinical Education Seminar’ (for 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, 2 credits: a participation in municipal schools at Nagano city and its reflection). Staffs of ‘Office for Promoting Clinical Education’ are coordinating these programs.

Another example with a little difference can be shown in the attempt of Yokohama National University, Faculty of Education and Human Sciences. New curriculum of the faculty aims to improve the programs with ‘Experiences’ at various educational fields besides the classroom lesson at schools. Students of the faculty should take part in the extra programs named ‘Field Study of Primary Education’ as continuous assistant teachers in 11 municipal elementary schools nearby the university and ‘Learning and Activities outside the School’ as supporters at various educational fields such as club activities, after-school care of schoolchildren and children’s camp during vacations and so on, besides regulated program of ‘Teaching Practice’ and ‘Basic Seminar’ (for 1<sup>st</sup> year students) and ‘Practical Study of Education’ (for 2<sup>nd</sup> year students) in advance.

Shimane University, Faculty of Education also shows the good example of curriculum reform with various ‘Experiences’. From 2004, students of the faculty have ‘1,000 hours experience’ (590 hours compulsory and 410 hours selective) in 4 years undergraduate course with three categories of ‘Basic Experience’, ‘Experience of School Education’ and ‘Experience of Clinical Counseling’. Staffs of Center for Promoting Education Practice are coordinating these programs.

An attempt of curriculum reform with ‘Quality Assurance’ can be shown at Hirosaki University, Faculty of Education. From 2004, the faculty has started new curriculum with more ‘Experience’ and ‘Reflection’ programs in their subjects for education such as ‘Introduction for Teachers’ Profession’ or ‘Teaching Practice’. ‘Tuesday Teaching Practice’ for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students is typical program of new curriculum. Every Tuesday, students have their class of teaching method of each school subject at university in the morning, and then they go to the attached schools (elementary and

junior high) in the afternoon and do teaching practice. In addition, new subject named 'General Seminar of Practice at Teachers' Pre-service Education' has been set up at 4<sup>th</sup> year, as a chance of 'Reflection' of students' total history of learning at university curriculum.

As shown above, there are many attempts to improve teachers' pre-service education curricula with various 'Experience' program set up continuously from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 4<sup>th</sup> year, and the fields of 'Experiences' are widely spread not only to schools but also various educational scenes out of school.

### 3-3: Problems of 'Experience' and 'Reflection' Program

The lap between 'Experience' and 'Reflection' is the key concept for not only to improve the teacher education curricula at undergraduate level, but also to create the new type of graduate school at postgraduate level from 2008. The 2006 Report of the Central Council of Education says that the key concept of 'Professional Graduate School of Education' is 'the lap between theory and practice'. And, more than 40% of the teaching staffs of Professional Graduate School of Education must be so-called 'Practical Teaching Staff' (*Jitsumuka-kyouin*) with plenty of practical career at educational fields. These 'Practical Teaching Staffs' are also increasing at undergraduate level.

But there still remain a lot of problems to improve teachers' pre-service education curricula with rich 'Experience' and 'Reflection' by the collaboration between 'Practical Teaching Staffs' and traditional faculty staffs with academic discipline.

More and more programs with 'Experience' have been introduced to the reformed curricula for teachers' pre-service education. But, at this point, working staffs for these 'Experience' program are sometimes limited to a few staffs with strong motivation for practical curricula, and collaboration among teacher educator as a whole is not enough. As a background of this problem, there has been a change among the deregulated universities in Japan that most of the traditional autonomy of faculty council has been abolished and replaced by 'top-down' style decision-making of the administration including presidents. 'Top-down' style is suitable for the quick reform, but 'slow and steady' is necessary for teacher education reform that requires the collaboration among the whole teacher educators from various specialties and positions.

In addition, the role of 'Practical Teaching Staff' has some difficulty. Teaching staff with plenty of practical career at educational fields does not mean a person who can provide a practical pre-service education program based on adequate case-studies at universities. Teaching staffs with a lot of 'Experience' will make it possible to talk her/his own experience itself, but all of them cannot give a practical education for teacher candidates. Traditional faculty staffs with academic career can exceed the 'Practical Teaching Staffs' in case they have adequate wisdom based on their own observation of educational practice fields. So more collaboration between traditional faculty staffs and 'Practical Teaching Staffs' and more development of teaching competencies of 'Practical Teaching Staffs' at universities are required to the future.

Otherwise, the fear of the lack of curricula frame to educate teachers with enough competencies still remains, since 'Reflection' without any academic or scientific backgrounds will incline to be only an emotional reflection.

#### IV. Conclusion: Teacher Education and Teachers' Image in Japan

As shown above, teacher education curricula in Japan are now on the way to be reformed with 'Experience' and 'Reflection' as their core, though there still remains some outstanding problems since postwar reform and neo-liberalistic trend spreads nationwide. In addition, some attempts are proceeding for 'Quality Assurance' of teacher education as a diploma policy of undergraduate education.

But unfortunately, no policy maker, no educational researcher can show a solid 'grand-design' for the reform. Only partial amendments have been made without any fundamental examination on present system of teacher education and teachers' license. Since 'Good Practice for Teacher Education' plans (competitive funding) are only for selected universities, they can have no more effect than temporally activations. So they cannot give any continuous infrastructure of teacher education in general.

Therefore it is a difficult but important issue that public education system in Japan should be macroscopically reexamined – what we will expect for present public education system, how can we introduce the market principle into education, how should we build the system to educate the teacher of public education system for next generation, etc. And it is indispensable to pay attention to the fact that the teachers' image in Japan is different from those of Occidental profession.

The original meaning of profession among Occidental areas based on Christianity is the person with profess by God to be in charge of highly public services that require excellent skills and knowledge in certain fields. Teachers in charge of public school system have dignities related to God and their main works are to 'teach' in each professional field with specialized knowledge.

But, teachers in Japan – and perhaps also in many Asian areas – have duties to deal properly with various school affairs so-called 'Escape from Learning' besides their work to 'teach' each subjects to students. In addition, there are no dignities related to God where Confucianism and/or Buddhism are major religion. The word '*Sensei*' (in Chinese pronunciation 'xian-sheng') is popular prefix for teachers in Japan that originally means 'a person who has been born earlier' or a person with plenty of life career. Thus teacher's image in Japan has a traditional meaning of the model with good human behavior for the followers from pre-modern age.

In this sense, it is important to consider about the occupational culture of Japanese teachers (with difference from 'profession') and the real difficulty of the tasks of Japanese teachers. Then the future for 'Experience' and 'Reflection' in teacher education curricula can be seen.

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