



Curriculum Center for Teachers  
Tokyo Gakugei Univ.

Creative Curricula & Teaching  
Newsletter

English Edition  
No. 3 July 2010

# Considering “Quality Assurance” in Teacher Education

Toyo University Junji Yamazaki

In recent years, educational circles have emphasized “quality assurance” and have strived to embody the idea in various areas, from elementary education to higher education. Among others, the maintenance and improvement of the quality of teachers is often discussed as a key measure to resolve various educational issues. For that reason, much emphasis has been placed on “quality assurance” in the field of teacher education.

I have had opportunities to be involved in work related to “quality assurance” in teacher education at faculties and graduate schools. I was able to learn a great deal on those occasions and feel that the following two points are particularly important to confront “quality assurance” issues in the future.

The first includes problems of standards for evaluation to improve quality assurance. I have had the experience of being involved in drafting a standard for the accreditation in the Graduate School of Professional Teacher Education. The experience showed me that a standard proposal should be not merely to maintain a certain level of quality, but also to contribute to improving the level. Additionally, it is important not to produce an evaluation based on a centralized and unified standard, but instead to produce an evaluation to support and encourage challenges with characteristics and features of each university. I would like to emphasize this very principle repeatedly. Now, an accreditation of teacher education in undergraduate programs is becoming a policy issue, as well as an issue related to Graduate Schools of Professional Teacher Education. It is necessary to fulfill demands for accountability and to forge understandings and agreements with people beyond those who are involved directly in education. However, we should always take great care not to lean toward centralized uniformity, quantification under the name of objectification, and ranking of evaluation results on those grounds. Furthermore, careful considerations will be needed for problems such as associated with making a “core curriculum” as one measure for clarifying the content of teacher education; and those over the nature of evaluation itself on which basis the quality of teacher education is judged (“process evaluation” or “outcome evaluation”).

The second include problems of evaluation systems to improve quality assurance. From my experience, having been



involved in approval processes for teacher education courses, the improvement of post evaluation systems is even more important than preliminary screening systems because the development of the systems has lagged considerably. It is now becoming a pressing political subject. However, the development of post-evaluation systems will be utterly difficult because numerous universities offer teacher education courses and their ideals, history, and characteristics are also diverse. Considering this improvement problem reminds me of the idea of “*Chiiki kyoshi kyoiku kiko* (Regional organization for teacher education)” set out by people involved in teacher training courses in private universities some 20 years ago. The idea could be said to construct a pre-post evaluation system. It included a peer review type of course approval operation based on a cooperative system of national, public, and private universities in each region, not based on a unified, centralized type system by the government and public administrations. Universities with teacher education courses pointed out problems about the system itself in the opening and implementation of the teaching license renewal program. However, simultaneously, they set up collaborative discussions and cooperation organizations in good faith and have won trust in each prefecture and region by overcoming differences based on types of universities. Now, many years later, we can say with certainty that the experience has taken a first step toward embodying the idea presented above from a contemporary viewpoint.

# Teacher Education in an Era of Low Birthrates

Director, Curriculum Center for Teachers, Tokyo Gakugei University Toshiki Sakai

Declining birthrates have presented a huge social issue for eastern Asia, including Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan. Particularly in South Korea and Taiwan, they were sufficiently serious to record the lowest overall fertility rate in the world one after another since 2005. All of these eastern Asian regions have achieved, or are now achieving, rapid economic growth, although their timing differs slightly. Once the economy started growing, traditional fertility was regarded as a hindrance to economic growth; then population control measures were emphasized. Furthermore, liberalization and marketization policies of economy and institutions from around 1980 have been developed, coupled with the transition from the phase of population control to a lower birthrate society. Although being compared with European welfare states, regions in eastern Asia have begun to strengthen their liberal policies (small government) since around 1980 before becoming mature welfare states. In that regard, they are about to enter a super-aging society with a declining birthrate before they reach the status of welfare states.

In structural terms, the decline of fertility rates is caused by a burden on the household budget resulting from a gap separating the progress of affluence accompanying economic growth and increasing investment necessary to support children. Presently it is progressing coupled with the following factors: search for values other than childbirth and child rearing; fluctuation of the traditional view of the family, and changes of the view of the marriage such as a tendency to marry later or not at all. In eastern Asia, there is an urgent need to construct sustainable systems for the economy, society, and education according to the new population structure: an aging society with a declining birthrate.

What impact does the birthrate decline have on school education? Relatively large families used to function as the basic unit of society and large families played a significant role in the development of children. Even if not wealthy, they took on welfare functions and further educational aspects, as well as upbringing functions. In contrast, today's trends toward nuclear families and disturbance of family relations make family roles less significant even in the role of stabilizing economic life, in addition to less stably serving roles of upbringing, welfare, and education. For children, a harsh reality is spreading. It is also readily apparent that behind this background is a prob-



lem of a widening economic gap in a competitive society.

Schools in the era of low birthrates confront problems including the fact that they have become smaller and that environments have become less and less a place for children to work hard together. In addition to those problems, schools must take on problems arising from the transformation of social structure which are the grounds or causes of the birthrate decline. Children in economic poverty are said to have particularly increased. Although not so high as in the United States, it is pointed out that the child poverty rate in Japan has increased to 14%. Studies of child poverty have lagged behind. Consequently, meticulous educational studies are expected to clarify how children in poverty are to be encouraged to develop and shown how they can put their hopes in school life.

Since 2000, South Korea has increased education and welfare budgets. Its education budget as a percentage of GDP ranked fourth among the OECD member countries in 2008. Educational programs to use after school hours are being developed for children who are not guaranteed the right to education. It could be understood that they are trying to transform into a late-developing welfare state.

Universities also should more actively address problems such as declining birthrates and child poverty. The nature of development in teacher education should in all reason be carried forward with particular emphasis on problems that are difficult to identify among the problems associated with the declining birthrate.

# Research Project of the Division of Teacher Preparation Research and Development

## Internationalising European Teacher Education

The Division of Teacher Preparation Research and Development of Curriculum Center for Teachers surveys not only practices in Japan but also exerts great effort in foreign countries. The purpose is to highlight problems facing teacher education in Japan through attention to teacher education policies and curriculums in foreign countries.

For example, the European Union (EU) reported in its documents for teacher education policy that students wanting to become teachers are encouraged to study abroad. On the other hand, in recent years, Japanese higher education institutions offering teacher-training courses are expected to send graduates who are proficient in educational guidance and classroom management into schools. It can be said only slightly that experiences in living abroad, including learning foreign languages, are assigned great importance as the basis to develop the quality of teachers. Certainly, Japanese universities and faculties for teacher education have so far developed exchange programs with higher education institutions abroad, but very few students who want to become teachers study abroad using such programs.

The premise of EU teacher education policy to promote students to study abroad is the standardization of higher education systems (Bologna Process) starting in 1999. It was designed to increase mobility among students within Europe by aligning academic degree systems which vary among countries.

The EU teacher education policy is closely associated with the cause of European integration. Although apparently seeming to be irrelevant to the context that Japan stands, it is actually thought-provoking because global sensitivity and knowledge which are expected to be acquired through foreign experiences would be necessary for teachers in Japan as well.

Given such problem consciousness, for two years from 2008, we conducted a study with visiting professors from



Banner hanging from a window of the Humboldt University of Berlin to inform people of the calling of a strike. (Taken by author)

Germany and Sweden and domestic researchers with the theme of internationalisation of teacher education.

Results revealed that students in Germany wanting to become teachers are doing well in an overall tendency that studying abroad has stagnated. Surprisingly, it is the implementation of Bologna Process to be pointed out as the reason for stagnation of studying abroad. It is argued that the overcrowded curricula cannot allow sufficient time to study abroad. (This often becomes a target for protests by students.) Of course it is compulsory in majors in foreign languages. However, even in other majors, students who want to be teachers consider studying abroad as a rare invaluable opportunity that is difficult to experience after getting a teaching job. Therefore, they go abroad by managing their study plans.

Meanwhile, student who wants to become a teacher in Sweden is not as active as students in other majors, which is similar to Japan on this point. However, in the country that actively accepts immigrants and overseas students, the internationalisation of teacher education courses has been promoted by means such as increasing the number of lessons conducted in English.

In February this year, we released the "[Europe ni okeru kyoshikyoiku no kokusaika kenkyu project hokokusho](#)" (Research project report on the internationalisation of teacher education in Europe)" summarizing achievements for such projects. It is accessible through the Center website. Please visit if you are interested in this subject. (Yoshimi Uesugi)

## Expectations for the Curriculum Center for Teachers

Hideki Yonekawa

Osaka Kyoiku University

Member of the Advisory Board for the Curriculum Center for Teachers

Initial teacher education in Japan is now entering a period of great change. Since the change of government last year, transition to a six-year teacher education program has been opened for discussion, as well as the abolition of the Teaching License Renewal Program. In this time of change, the following two points will be required for all initial teacher education institutions in Japan: 1) A policy-making contribution of what sort of blueprint of an initial teacher education system; and 2) Their involvement in quality assurance of teachers. What are required for 1) are detailed analyses from historical and global viewpoints and presentation of a policy menu. Requirements for 2) are examination of the content of teacher education curriculums and a way in which universities will get involved in a future national model and development of teachers in their

professional careers. Particularly, the way that in-service training should be conducted and the contents of it at universities must be examined.

Regarding policies for fostering teachers in 1), the Center has so far made large contributions by performing several research projects and international symposia. I hope that such challenges will be continued to the future. From the viewpoint of reconstructing Japanese initial teacher education, I think that the Center has entered the transitional period to the next stage (level of policy formation) based on its remarkable academic accomplishments.

I believe that a standpoint from a national curriculum of teacher education is necessary for quality assurance of teachers in 2). This contains a challenge for a difficult task to scrutinize a model core curriculum further, including the content of subjects. On top of it, initial teacher education institutions in Japan are expected to shift increasingly to in-service training of teachers. The appropriate response to this is also being investigated.

I have no doubt that now, more than ever, initial teacher education institutions all over Japan have pinned their hopes on the Center.

## Sites Where Teachers Are Nurtured

Graduate School of Professional Teacher Education, Tokyo Gakugei University  
Seiji Kawasaki

Since 1996, when I arrived to take up a new position in this university, I conducted observations of elementary schools in Hawaii. In fiscal year 2001, I had a sabbatical and conducted an intensive observation. The elementary school selected for a field study was a cooperating school for the Master of Education in Teaching program of the University of Hawaii, and approximately 20 student teachers turned up on a regular basis. I had no idea at the time what the Master of Education in Teaching program was for. At the same time of being surprised at practice teaching throughout the year, I had even a joyous impression of student teachers who appeared once or twice a week because practice teaching seemed very easy-going. In reality, they took theoretical classes at the university, organized project studies in essays, and made presentations at staff meetings of cooperating schools. I actually attended staff meetings and listened to presentations. Each presentation was full of suggestive and practical contents for cooperating schools. It even drew encouraging plaudits from teachers: "Do you have your card?" (meaning, "I want to give you a job").

Seven years later, I came to teach at the Graduate School of Professional Teacher Education of this university; it was nothing less than fate. The reason why I demand a far more rigorous standard for the quality of project studies as an alternative to master theses than other teachers is based on the experiences described above. It is quite possible for even student teachers to extract problems at school sharply and present improvement plans, or to follow up on the actual conditions of children theoretically.

Our Graduate School of Professional Teacher Education has a considerable number of students who did not read pedagogy in undergraduate years. Just after enrollment, those students show puzzlement at research methods used in pedagogy and show ambivalence toward human study and occasionally cannot step forward. I can understand those feelings well because I myself shifted from jurisprudence to pedagogy. However, during the following six months or so after practice teaching started, they sometimes come to have more problem-consciousness than their classmates who graduated from pedagogy. It might be because theoretical perspectives cultivated in class come to engage with daily practices in cooperating schools. It is about us ourselves that I suddenly feel uneasiness on such occasions: I wonder whether we are continuing to grow as researchers, as well as being teachers. Postgraduate students are watching this point carefully. They discern it very well.

## Terminology of Teacher Education

### Mataha (neither) subjects

Subject groups which should be taken to obtain a teacher certificate in Japan have been divided broadly into "subjects related to school subjects" and "subjects related to the teaching". With the revision of the act in 1998, "subjects related to school subjects or the teaching" were newly added to them. They are the so-called "mataha (neither) subjects". For example, the requirements for the first-class certificate for elementary school teachers are 8 credits in "school subjects", 41 credits in the "teaching", and 10 credits in "mataha subjects".

The "mataha subjects" can be arranged as follows at each university's discretion: assigning previous "school subjects" or

the "teaching" subjects; or setting a unique subject group for this category. In general, the faculties such as literature and science increase "school subjects", whereas the faculties for education tend to increase the "teaching". Furthermore, diverse examples are observed because of this category's peculiarity: cross-subject type (curriculum, information, etc.) subjects; subjects related to English taught during elementary school (not regarded as a "subject" at this point); and so on.

This arrangement results from the fact that the revision of the act in 1998 allowed some latitude in the planning undertaken at each university, although intending to weigh heavily on the "teaching profession". For that reason, several problems have been created. For example, constructing a nation-wide standard becomes difficult. (Yasuyuki Iwata)

## Events Calendar

Saturday, November 20, 2010 (tentative)  
The 9th Workshop for Practicing  
Teacher Education

Saturday, December 4, 2010  
The 11th Annual Symposium "The future  
curriculum of school and teacher  
education" (tentative)

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Tokyo Gakugei University.

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