A theoretical outline
for assessing teacher-training curricula

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Abstract

Much of the process in educating teachers remains somewhat of a mystery, even to others in the same field. As no standard practices for teacher education have been forthcoming, this article investigates the literature on the cohesion of purpose that has been reached in other settings, outlining the features and principles of effective teacher education programs. The paper concludes with a proposal for instituting a mixed-method strategy for assessing and improving teacher education from the position of incoming motivation and outgoing abilities.

Keywords: Curriculum, Pre-service teachers, Principles, Assessment

Introduction

The necessity of cohesion of purpose in teacher education has been well established in the literature (Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006a). Even knowing this, many teacher education programs remain, as one researcher puts it, "the Dodge City of the education world. Like the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and disordered (Levine, 2006, p.109)." Further, pre-service teachers may have little understanding or appreciation for what they learn in university, as the theory is often disconnected from practice. As Hattie (2009) states "[s]pending three to four years in teacher training seems to lead to teachers who are reproducers, teachers who teach like the teachers they liked most when they were in school, and teachers who too often see little value in anything other than practice-based learning on the job (p.110)."

There is also evidence that teachers without intensive teacher training can often perform nearly as well as undergraduate trained teachers in terms of student learning and achievement outcomes (Boyd et al. 2008; Goldhaber and Brewer, 2000; Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger, 2008). This can be further seen in the Japanese context, where teachers' primary induction into teaching happens not through their undergraduate study, but rather after being hired as full time workers (Howe, 2005; 2008), which creates a situation where new teachers are apprenticed to the methods of older teachers, whether or not these methods and teachers promote learning (Cook, 2010; Nakata, 2011). This effectively negates any differences between graduates from teacher training and non-teacher training oriented universities. Especially in the case of English teaching where the *yakudoku* (grammar translation) style of teaching dominates in order to cover for teachers' lack of English ability (Cook, 2010; Nagasawa, 2004) new teachers may be pushed into this mode of in spite of being trained in other more real-world effective methods (Kurihara & Samimy, 2007; Nakata, 2011; Nagasawa, 2004)

In order to break away from this negative "copycat" style of language teaching and

improve the quality of teachers entering the field of teaching, greater relevance and induction needs to built into undergraduate teacher training. This paper explores some of the issues involved in connecting theory to practice.

Components of strong teacher education

It has been noted that teacher training practices for foreign language teachers have not been well, if at all, documented (Wright, 2010). While this "black box" of teacher education remains as of yet unopened, some benefit can come from investigations of highly successful teacher training programs from the world of general education, which include programs for language teachers.

While teacher training programs are highly varied and their practice and outcomes (Walsh, 2001), there have been a number of in-depth studies on the outcomes of highly successful teacher training programs. In the conclusions of a large-scale investigation of high-functioning teacher training institutions, Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) outlined the key practices involved in training high quality teachers. She found that top programs include the following seven features of strong teacher training programs:

1. Coherence based on a common, clear vision of good teaching that permeates all coursework and clinical experiences
2. Well-defined standards of practice and performance that guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work
3. Curriculum grounded in knowledge of child and adolescent development, learning, social contexts, and subject matter pedagogy
4. Extended clinical experiences carefully developed to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous closely interwoven coursework
5. Explicit strategies to help student teachers to confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning.
6. Strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs that link

all who are teaching these prospective teachers.
7. Assessment based on professional standards that evaluate teaching through demonstrations of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios.

Using the above principles as a means of measurement, teacher education programs can assess their programs for both strengths and points in need of improvement.

Further work exploring the content of high functioning teacher education courses in multiple settings can be found in the review by Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell (2006). This study as well offers concrete examples of practices used by institutions to produce high quality teachers. Looking at three universities in the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia, these researchers found a number of common principles that scaffold undergraduates toward becoming effective practitioners. The seven principles they list are as follows:

1. Learning about teaching involves continuously conflicting and competing demands

In order to prepare teachers for the pressures of teaching, institutions must provide their students with a structurally rigorous and challenging curriculum. As Darling-Hammond (2006) indicated in her features of high-quality programs, providing students with highly demanding coursework and many hundreds or even thousands of supervised classroom hours provides such necessary exposure. This also connects to the results found by Hattie (2009), wherein microteaching provides pre-service teachers with particularly demanding and powerful learning experiences which lead to strong student achievement.

2. Learning about teaching requires a view of knowledge as a subject to be created rather than as a created subject

Teachers need to develop a flexible understanding of knowledge and learning. This means university curricula must build connections both within and between subject matters in order to prepare students to teach. A concrete understanding of

the interdisciplinary nature of learning is crucial for preparing quality teachers. This means that teachers must develop both a broad global and domain specific understanding of their subject matter through exploration and experimentation in order to provide students with similarly powerful learning experiences.

3. Learning about teaching requires a shift in focus from the curriculum to the learner

This necessitates moving away from the natural tendency to focus on curricular rather than student based issues in the classroom. Institutions can provide students with a greater understanding of learners and their cognitive processes not through extensive theory based classwork unconnected to practice, but through providing pre-service teachers with careful and clear examples of theory in action through fieldwork observation.

4. Learning about teaching is enhanced through (student) teacher research

Providing pre-service teachers with both the methodological resources and opportunities to conduct their own student-oriented research is a key element in moving away from the solely exam based subject-oriented focus that many teachers develop (Cook, 2010; Nakata, 2011; Nagasawa, 2004). Teacher candidates need to be well versed in objective observational methodologies at the very least, preferably with strong psychological and developmental theories that have been scaffolded through field-based examples. This further means that fieldwork experiences need to be focused around a clear research agenda.

5. Learning about teaching requires an emphasis on those learning to teach working closely with their peers

Chances for peer observation and peer feedback allow for powerful learning. Studies on the influence of the peer group in adolescents, teenagers and university students have indicated that the peer group has a highly significant impact on student learning (Hattie, 2009). Through clear institutional goals for a peer-based feedback model, pre-service and early career teachers can benefit from the use of feedback and reflection in

their pedagogical training (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

6. Learning about teaching requires meaningful relationships between schools, universities and student teachers

In order to facilitate positive and progressive student research, there must be careful interrelationship between the teacher training and participating professional development schools. Just as with medicine and medical trainees and the teaching hospitals where they perform internships, professional development schools must serve as the objective laboratories for training.

7. Learning about teaching is enhanced when the teaching and learning approaches advocated in the program are modeled by the teacher educators in their own practice

This element is perhaps the most important in the re-training of students to become effective teachers. As noted in the work by Darling-Hammond (2006a) and Hattie (2009), students often emulate their favorite teachers rather than attempting to innovate and become self-regulated learners. This can be used to the advantage of teacher educators by fulfilling that role, and becoming the model by which pre-service teachers engage with and involve their future students in learning activities (Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007). This view must also be tempered by the reality that not all faculty at teacher education institutions are entirely oriented towards self-regulatory and highly engaged practice (Tillema & Kremer-Hayon, 2002). Educators at these institutions must carefully consider how they model their own learning practices and enthusiasm for learning to students.

These aspects and elements of highly effective teacher education programs have been indicated both through theory and practice to have strong effects on both graduating teacher quality and long-term student achievement.

Theoretical prerequisites for transfer

Transfer is defined as the ability of a student to apply their learning on a variety of different contexts (Alexander, 2006). Of significant interest to the process of transfer in teacher education is the concept of how the learners (pre-service teachers) themselves construct the knowledge base needed for professional practice. As indicated above in the discussion of program principles for education programs, a significant period of time must be given over to real world exploration, experimentation, and reflection. In this way, the model of psychological transfer very much resembles that described by Winne and Nesbit (2010). In their review, they describe learning as the process of "the way learners make things," based on learners agentic perspective (Bandura, 2006), in which learners set goals and choose the values of tasks based on their subjective task value (Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

However, there are several important considerations when considering the Japanese teacher education context. First, and most generally, learners of all types are typically poor at managing their learning processes and overconfident about their abilities (Maki, 1998), especially without a great deal of real world feedback (Kruger & Dunning, 1999), thus emphasizing the importance of fieldwork experiences for teachers. Second, Japanese learners are unaccustomed to autonomous focused learning without the aid of an authority to help scaffold them (Berwick & Ross, 1989). This trend has been found in other contexts with other Asian learners as well (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009; Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004), thus calling into question the value of autonomy without clear scaffolded structure and goals.

The role of motivation and teachers' abilities

In numerous investigations of pre-service teacher education (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2005; 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2008), the primary and strongest motivational orientation for teachers was intrinsic motivation for the work. This was especially the case with teachers who showed the highest orientation towards persisting in education in spite of the heavy workload (Watt & Richardson, 2008).

Further work looking at the attributions of in-service teachers reveals that the expectancies and values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) that teachers place on professional tasks plays a significant role in their motivation. By looking at teachers values as predictors of their choices and expectancies as their ability beliefs, similar to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), Watt and Richardson (Watt & Richardson, 2007) developed the FIT-Choice scale in order to measure teacher motivation. This scale can serve to assess teachers' readiness for the rigors of a focused teacher training program. As the intrinsic motivation to teach has been indicated to be one of the strongest features of individuals who are willing to engage in teaching as a long-term career and capable of performing at a high level (Watt & Richardson, 2007), this tool may offer insights into readiness for teacher education.

In structuring teacher education in Japan, a clear series of outcome variables is also necessary. Using the work done by Darling-Hammond (2006a; (Darling-Hammond, 2006b), developing and validating scales to allow students to assess their learning will be of high value to the field of teacher education in Japan. Ideally, these instruments should determine students' assessment of their ability to develop effective curricula, teach and assess a variety of different learners, work under pressure in the classroom, and develop their skills through objective lesson study.

Conclusions and implications

While this literature review merely scratches the surface of the issues in teacher education in Japan, it offers some framework toward the development of future standards and practices for effective teacher education. By looking at the values, expectancies, abilities, and outcomes of teacher education programs, we can create a more objective environment for the study of teacher education, and thus serve as self-regulated role models for scaffolding pre-service

teachers to becoming self-regulated learners (Lunenberg et al., 2007; Lunenberg & Samaras, 2011). Through the proper application these fundamental theories, teacher education can move ahead create highly skilled educational practitioners.

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