

Considering the Philosophy of Education from the Front Line of Teacher Training

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Abstract

This paper discusses roles and tasks of the philosophy of education based on concrete studies of the involvement of researchers of the discipline in practical teacher training, by referring to the author's own experiences at the front line of teacher training at Hyogo University of Teacher Education and Kobe University, which take contrasting approaches to teacher training. The philosophy of education takes the following two roles: (1) education in the discipline; and (2) the designing of teacher training. Of the two, the latter has more importance than the former. In the design of teacher training, a considerable amount of "play" should be secured to compensate for today's rational and goal-oriented teacher training.

Keywords

teacher training, philosophy of education, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Kobe University

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the philosophy of education from the perspective of teacher training rather than vice versa. In other words, rather than exploring ideal states of teacher training and the significance of the philosophy of education based on abstract concepts, its roles and tasks are clarified through concrete studies of the involvement of researchers in the discipline in practical teacher training.

In this discussion, the paper also refers to the author's own experiences at the front line of teacher training at Hyogo University of Teacher Education and Kobe University, which take contrasting approaches to teacher training. To illustrate the purport of this paper, I would first like to introduce an outcome of previous studies of teacher training in the field of the philosophy of education.

2. An outcome of previous studies of teacher training and the philosophy of education

As one outcome of previous studies of teacher training in the field of the philosophy of education, I would like to introduce a book titled, “*Kyouin Yousei wo Tetsugaku suru: Kyouiku Tetsugaku ni nani ga dekiruka*” (A Philosophical Study of Teacher Training: Roles of the Philosophy of Education, Hayashi et al., 2014). This book discusses the roles and significance of the philosophy of education from diverse viewpoints, in light of the situation where teacher training and school activities have begun to increasingly prioritize the development of practical teaching abilities. The book was written driven by a strong sense of crisis concerning the current reform of teacher training in Japan, which reinforces “*jissen shiko*” (practical approaches) in the trend toward “*genri teki na kosatsu no so wo usukusuru*” (thinning the layer of studies of principles). (P. 100) This sense of crisis, which is shared by many researchers of the philosophy of education, characterizes the entire book.

However, the co-authors of the book are not unified in their views and viewpoints. It seems to me that their views concerning the significance of the philosophy of education can be roughly classified into three categories.

Proponents of the first category suggest that the philosophy of education should be treated as an established, independent discipline, and that its role is to provide educational sciences and related technologies with integrated views, and to critically review and reorient present educational practices from a broad perspective. To use Matsuura’s terminology, this category can be termed *mohan-gata* or a model type. The second category comprises what Matsuura calls *senryaku-gata* or a strategic type. Rather than regarding the philosophy of education as an established discipline, proponents of this type of view stress the importance of addressing respective educational problems as each situation demands. At the same time, they believe that “the roles of the philosophy of education should be determined along with methods to develop its potential through joint efforts with researchers of other educational sciences” (P. 242). Finally, proponents of the third category focus on and critically review the theory-practice schema, which represents how a theory can contribute to practice (through appropriate policies).

From the viewpoints of these three categories, the book convincingly emphasizes the significance and usefulness of the philosophy of education in teacher training and school activities. Since the book has sufficiently demonstrated the significance of the discipline, based on this recognition, researchers of the philosophy of education may ask themselves what is left for

them to explore. I would suggest that there are two important study themes for researchers to deal with. Firstly, the role and significance of the philosophy of education should be clarified and included in the curriculums of teacher training at universities. Secondly, the philosophy of education should be included in holistic teacher training systems, including advanced training programs for in-service teachers. In this paper, I would like to focus my discussion on the first theme. I will discuss the various roles of the philosophy of education in teacher training by referring to my own experiences of serving at Hyogo University of Teacher Education (academic years 1997 to 2013) and the Faculty of Human Development of Kobe University (academic years 2014 to present day), where I am engaged in the education of elementary school teachers.

3. Teacher training at Hyogo University of Teacher Education and Kobe University

(1) Hyogo University of Teacher Education

Hyogo University of Teacher Education was established in October 1978 with the aim of providing in-service teachers with advanced training. Since its establishment, the university has been serving at the front line of teacher training reforms in Japan. The prospectus of the university states: “In response to social demands to improve the abilities of in-service teachers and foster more teachers for elementary schools, the university shall establish a graduate school designed to provide in-service teachers with opportunities for research and advanced training, along with a faculty that fosters teachers for elementary schools. With the focus on the education of the graduate school, the university shall promote practical education and research into school education.” (Hyogo University of Teacher Education, 1988)

The university has a single faculty to foster teachers of elementary education. The faculty admits up to 200 students, with 160 students currently enrolled. The faculty is dedicated to the development of kindergarten and elementary school teachers. Whereas conventional educational universities focus their efforts on the linkage between elementary and secondary education in terms of both curriculums and educational organizations, Hyogo University of Teacher Education concentrates its efforts on the continuation of kindergarten and elementary school education.

According to Nobuhiro Miyoshi, the principles of teacher training can be classified into those based on what he calls “liberalism” and those based on “professionalism” (Miyoshi, 1972). Similarly, Noboru Yamada classified

teachers into “academics” (specialists in a specific subject) and “educationalists” (specialists in education) (Yamada, 1970). The views based on “liberalism” in training and teachers as “academics” have become the mainstream in secondary education. Proponents of this notion believe that anyone who has mastered a specific discipline can be a teacher of that subject. On the other hand, the notions of “professionalism” and “educationalists” have gained greater support in elementary education. Proponents of these views suggest that teachers need a background in pedagogy and experience in practice teaching.

In terms of these classifications, Hyogo University of Teacher Education can be categorized into the group of professionalism-oriented institutes. However, the university also maintains an academically-oriented system under which courses on specific subjects are provided. This system, commonly known as the “peak system,” requires students to study a specific subject deeply, while at the same time to engage in the comprehensive study of a range of subjects.

The university offers a four-year practice teaching program, which starts shortly after students’ enrollment and ends in the fourth year. This unique and unconventional program has presented a model for other universities. As a front-runner in teacher training, the university continues to take on various challenges, including the founding of Japan’s largest professional graduate school for teacher training (admitting up to 100 students) and the development of teacher education standards under the Good Practice (GP) program of Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

(2) Kobe University

Kobe University comprises 11 faculties (and 15 graduate schools). Of these faculties, the Faculty of Human Development plays a leading role in teacher training under the “open system,” whereby students of other faculties can also obtain teacher’s licenses under certain conditions. The predecessor of the university was Hyogo Normal School, which was founded in 1877. Its Faculty of Education was established in 1949, following the end of World War II, and was reorganized into the Faculty of Human Development in 1992. Concurrently with this reorganization, the faculty adopted the open system. After a quarter of a century, however, fostering educational specialists is currently regarded as having less importance, as is evident from the fact that successors of educational programs of specific subjects have become selected by faculties of the respective disciplines. In this environment, the Faculty of

Human Development has been striving to maintain the function of fostering elementary school teachers, producing a small number of teachers at the Elementary Education Division (admitting up to 30 students) of the Department of Human Development and Education. Instead of the “peak system,” under which students are encouraged to study specific subjects, the division seeks to foster all-round “professional” educationalists.

Kobe University is currently promoting structural reforms to reinforce university functions. As a part of this initiative, in academic year 2017 the university plans to combine the Faculty of Human Development and the Faculty of Intercultural Studies and establish a Faculty of Global Human Sciences. The university plans to create four departments under this new faculty, including a Department of Child Education, which will continue elementary teacher training. At present, the university is preparing for the establishment of a university founding committee and a teacher education curriculum committee.

4. Involvement of a researcher of the philosophy of education

To date, I have been engaged in teacher training at Hyogo University of Teacher Education and Kobe University. Although I am a specialist in new education in Germany, I have been committed to research into teacher training, which entails tremendous efforts and much time, because I believe that fostering excellent teachers is indispensable for education. Needless to say, education plays a key role in fostering children and in the development of society. To improve the quality of education, it is therefore essential to continue to enhance the quality of our teaching staff. With this view in mind, I would like to review my own experiences of teacher training at the two universities from the three viewpoints described below.

(1) Teaching of the philosophy of education

Firstly, I have long been involved in teaching the philosophy of education. During lectures and seminars at the universities, I have imparted my knowledge concerning the philosophy of education to my students. At the same time, together with students, I have explored solutions to various educational problems by taking a philosophical approach.

Specific subjects that I taught at Hyogo University of Teacher Education include the history of education, the history of thoughts on school education, and educational anthropology; while those I now teach at Kobe University include the philosophy of education, the history of educational thoughts, and

moral education theories. At Hyogo University of Teacher Education, my main theme concerned research into various thoughts on school education. On the other hand, at Kobe University, in addition to school education, I deal with various types of education, including those provided at home and in communities for all generations ranging from babies to the elderly. Despite this difference, at both universities I have basically adopted the same approach, that is, to critically review modern education in the historical and social contexts by regarding the philosophy of education as a part of pedagogic education.

When I teach the philosophy of education, I take an approach of the first type (*mohan-gata* or model type) described earlier in this paper, which stresses the significance of the philosophy of education. In other words, during my classes I held discussions with students, based on the understanding that the role of the philosophy of education is to provide educational sciences and related technologies with integrated views, and to critically review and reorient educational practices from a broad perspective.

(2) Holistic design of teacher training

Secondly, I have also been involved in the holistic design of teacher training. At Hyogo University of Teacher Education, I took the initiative in the first full-fledged revision of the faculty curriculums (in academic year 2008) since the founding of the university, and the development of teacher training standards in the Good Practice (GP) program of Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (academic years 2009–2011). At Kobe University, I am responsible for the certification of new curriculums for the teacher-training course for the new faculty to be established in the 2017 academic year.

The two universities are different concerning the following items. At Hyogo University of Teacher Education, elementary teacher training is stipulated in the prospectus for the establishment of the new faculty. Accordingly, the purpose of establishing the new faculty has direct implications for its vision of teacher training. On the other hand, the mission of the new faculty of Kobe University is stipulated as “developing cooperative human resources with global perspectives.” Accordingly, our first challenge was to link this mission with the vision of elementary teacher training. After thorough discussions with other faculty members, I developed the following vision for the Department of Child Education: “With the ultimate aim of pursuing a harmonious global community through the development of future generations, the Department of Child Education will foster human resources to

engage in elementary education, who will adopt a broad perspective concerning the global community, and have the abilities necessary to recognize—from diverse angles—the challenges facing both children and schools, and to find practical solutions to such challenges.

Throughout my service at both universities, I have been developing a holistic vision of teacher training from a wide perspective. When I engaged in the preparation of teacher education standards at Hyogo University of Teacher Education, I selected 50 abilities and qualities required for teachers. Rather than simply listing these 50 items, I classified them into several categories and arranged them in a structured form. At Kobe University, I have developed a vision for fostering teachers as well as a vision for the teaching curriculums, by seeking an optimal balance between the following three elements: [1] the expertise and study outcomes accumulated in the Faculty of Human Development; [2] the vision underlying the new faculty; and [3] the criteria for certifying teacher-training courses, which have become increasingly rigorous. Through these personal experiences, I have developed a strong conviction that the philosophy of education—developed through studies of diverse visions about teachers based on a holistic view of society and human beings—can and should play a leading role in the search for the ideal qualities of teachers.

(3) Securing “play” in teacher training

In designing teacher training, I have been striving to include a considerable amount of “play” in teacher training programs. In this context, the term “play” refers to room for potential learning and hands-on training that cannot be confined within the framework of current “rational” teacher training, which is most notably characterized by a means-ends schema.

When I explained the practical use of the teacher education standards to other faculty members at Hyogo University of Teacher Education, I repeatedly stressed the following characteristics of such teacher education standards. The standards do not cover all abilities and qualities required for teachers. Even though teachers have diverse types of abilities and personalities as an integral part of their presence, the standards can only list measurable abilities and qualities. Moreover, the standards list the minimum number of abilities and qualities essential for becoming teachers. Accordingly, it must be remembered that there are certainly other important abilities and qualities for teachers that are not specified within the standards.

In preparing and providing their classes, respective faculty members are expected to work to develop students’ abilities and qualities as specified in the

curriculum maps. At the same time, they are expected not to restrict the desired abilities of teachers to those specified in the curriculum maps. Instead, faculty members are encouraged to develop the abilities that they believe their students should acquire.

At Kobe University, I am currently striving to prepare curriculums that conform to the vision of the new department while also complying with the standards specified by the Teacher's License Act. Concerning hands-on training at the front line of schools, students are encouraged to participate in long-term school internship programs, in addition to the practice teaching, which has relatively well-established programs and fixed methods. Since the internship programs have greater flexibility, students are expected to build personal relationships with schoolchildren and teachers and learn from such relationships.

Recently, "functionalistic" teacher training is becoming increasingly influential. This of course has positive impacts, but at the same time, it is also true that students should learn beyond the framework of the teacher training provided by their universities so as to meet the changing demands of society and schools. In this sense, it is essential to include a considerable amount of "play" in the teacher training curriculums, as well as in our vision of "ideal" teachers. In preparing this vision and the curriculums, the knowledge accumulated in the philosophy of education should be fully utilized, as researchers of the discipline have been exploring what is possible and what is impossible for education, the significance and limited capacity of rational and goal-oriented education, and the unlimited possibilities of developing diverse human resources.

5. Conclusion

I have discussed the roles and tasks of the philosophy of education in teacher training. In summary, of the two roles of the philosophy of education, I believe that the designing of teacher training is more important than the teaching of the discipline. In the design of teacher training, a considerable amount of "play" should be secured to compensate for today's rational and goal-oriented teacher training in which a priority is placed on achieving set goals.

Finally, researchers in the philosophy of education are expected to exert their leadership in the front line of teacher training. At the same time, however, they are expected to promote more aggressively the importance of the roles of the philosophy of education in the front line of teacher training, as well as in preparation of policies concerning teacher training.

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