

Creating Networks for School Leaders: A Report from “Roundtable for Communities of Practice and Reflection” at Shizuoka University

Kasane Shibue,* Keigo Shimada, Atsushi Takei, Mitsuyoshi Mitsuya,
Yasutoshi Yamazaki, and Hisayoshi Yamaguchi
Department of Advanced Practice in School Education
Center for Promoting Higher-Quality Teacher Education
836, Oya, Suruga-ku, Shizuoka 422-8529, Japan
*Corresponding Author: eksibue@ipc.shizuoka.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study are to 1) report on the progress of the “Practical Study Round Table in Shizuoka (Shizuoka Round),” which began to advance teacher training at Shizuoka University’s Department of Education two years ago, and 2) show the meaning of and possibility that the university is responsible for this practice. To date, universities have engaged primarily in pre-service teacher training, rather than in-service training as well. The Shizuoka Round began as a strategic move to build an “integrated system for pre-service and in-service teacher training” by collaborating with the Board of Education, to focus on the “training of school management skills.” In addition to the people who wish to develop these skills, the Shizuoka Round involved a variety of members, such as Board of Education staff, university professors, and social educators, and discussed the day-to-day practices, regardless of an individual’s field, position, and community. Through this activity, we provided an environment in which to learn how to develop teachers as learners, which is the basis of the “training of school management skills.” We also demonstrated the function of the Shizuoka Round for university teachers, where they can explore and develop their practices to build an “integrated system for pre-service and in-service teacher training.”

Keywords: round table, school leaders, communities of practice, reflection

1. Introduction

The two primary educational policies that motivate the reform of pre- and in-service teacher training, and have been advanced in national universities for teacher training, are as follows: (1) the Central Council for Education (August 2012) *Report on Comprehensive Measures for Improving Teachers’ Abilities throughout Their Teaching Life*, stated the “necessity of performing integrated reform in order to continuously

support teachers who continuously learn through their teaching life by the cooperation and collaboration between the Board of Education and universities,” and (2) each national university must engage in a “redefinition of the mission” based on the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s “national university reform plan” (November 2013). In the field of teacher training, the mission has been redefined based on the “perspective of promoting science” in order to “strengthen the function of teacher training for improving the quality of teachers in charge of elementary and secondary education, while attempting the reduction of the number of teachers based on the future movement of population and the demand for teachers.”

Based on the redefinition of the mission, the Faculty of Education/Graduate School of Education, Shizuoka University determined that the basic directions of teacher training reform were “to improve the quality of teacher training from the perspective of ‘act globally, nationally, and locally’ in cooperation with domestic and foreign universities for teacher training and various education-related organizations in Shizuoka Prefecture, while linking with university reform coping with globalization and knowledge-based societies,” and to “build a teacher education system in the integrated type of pre-service and in-service teacher training (reconstruction of the Japanese teacher training system).”

The Practical Study Round Table in Shizuoka (hereinafter referred to as the Shizuoka Round) that is described in this report responded to the word “nationally” in the mission above. The practical study round table itself has been addressed by the University of Fukui’s Graduate School of Education (hereinafter referred to as the Fukui Round) as a study group to support “teacher education based on schools” and its purpose is that “a small number of various types of specialists review the long-term development of educational practices.” Shizuoka University held the Shizuoka Round as a member of the Collaboration for Reconstruction of Teacher Education that was established by the University of Fukui in 2013. We understood that this collaboration was a “national cooperative and collaborative organization” for teacher training. In fiscal year 2015, we will hold the third Shizuoka Round, which will have reached a turning point.

The process of developing the Shizuoka Round involved “displaying the characteristics of Shizuoka.” To this end, we incorporated the “training of school management skills” for in-service teachers into the Fukui Round, while we learned from its accomplishments (Umezawa, 2015, p. 29). This paper reviews the process and describes the prospects and problems of the Shizuoka Round below.

2. Why the Training of School Management Skills is Necessary

Osamu Umezawa, who was Dean at that time, and is Director of the Center for Promoting Higher-Quality Teacher Education (CPHTE) at present, discussed why in the process of teacher training reform at the Faculty of Education/Graduate School of Education, Shizuoka University believes that the training of school management skills is important.

To “build an integrated system for pre-service and in-service teacher training by getting out of the habitat segregation theory of pre-service training = university and employment and in-service training = the Board of Education,” it is necessary for us to perform the following two activities systematically and consciously, in which in-service training is incorporated, and to which universities have not responded systematically: (1) in cooperation and collaboration with the Board of Education and universities with teacher training courses in Shizuoka Prefecture, Shizuoka University participates systematically in designing an in-service teacher training program, develops a method to evaluate the results of the program appropriately (content, method, and evaluation criteria of a credit), and creates a common curriculum and credit for the in-service teacher training program at universities and graduate schools, and (2) in cooperation and collaboration with the Board of Education, Shizuoka University develops a model for an educational program that will support the professional development of teachers.

By creating these in-service training and educational programs, the “image of teachers as continuous learners” can be realized. This is extremely important in the organizational reform of universities and faculties of teacher training, and is the reason that Shizuoka University established CPHTE in 2014. The Shizuoka Round was also established under the above-mentioned circumstances (Umezawa, 2015).

Universities have been responsible primarily for pre-service teacher training. To build an integrated system for pre- and in-service teacher training in cooperation with the Board of Education, Shizuoka University established CPHTE and committed to cooperate with other universities in order to train teachers at their management levels.

Based on the above-mentioned circumstances, the Shizuoka Round was expected to provide an opportunity for university teachers and education center supervisors throughout the country who address themselves to reform pre- and in-service teacher training, including the training of school management skills, to exchange their frank opinions, create in-service training and educational programs by their cooperation and collaboration, and build relationships.

3. First Shizuoka Round

The first Shizuoka Round was held on January 25, 2014 and its theme was “Schools to support the improvement in teachers’ abilities: Listening to teachers’ growth and world’s trends.” As part of the Teacher Training Model Curriculum Development Program, National Center for Teachers’ Development, the afternoon session held an open symposium entitled, “Continuously growing teachers and education in Shizuoka: The role of schools and educational administration for a new era.”

During planning the Shizuoka Round, persons concerned with school education (teachers, supervisors, vice-principals, and principals) and university teachers were determined to be its main targets. The increase in the number of targets was due to the opinion that “the number of participants may be limited.” However, to attain the initial purpose, two subthemes, “A. Growth of teachers,” and “B. School management,” were set. The participants’ impressions¹ are described below.

- I understood that the Shizuoka Round provided me with the opportunity to realize my own growth and to find a clue to solve problems with educational practices (a person involved in university living in Shizuoka Prefecture who participated in subtheme A).
- It was an extremely valuable experience for me to listen to the career histories of experienced persons [syncopation] and the Shizuoka Round also provided other members with the opportunity to look back on their past when listening to the career histories of experienced persons. The career histories of experienced persons might be a role model for young teachers in particular (an officer involved in social education not living in Shizuoka Prefecture and participated in subtheme A).
- Opinion exchanges were very active, so a coffee break could not be secured, and I was extremely satisfied. It was a rare experience for me to discuss with principals of elementary and junior high schools and senior high school teachers in the same group on the actual situation of education in Shizuoka Prefecture (university teacher not living in Shizuoka Prefecture who participated in subtheme B).
- Although management needs an organizing ability, I realized again that it is essential for each individual to relate to each other and to collaboratively and organically perform team play (university teacher not living in Shizuoka Prefecture who participated in subtheme B).
- I thought that the Shizuoka Round, where a small number of people belonging to different fields can deeply discuss the same theme, was extremely meaningful. To deepen my own understanding of a matter, the matter must be familiar to me. I think that my thought becomes more flexible, more certain, and more expandable than ever as I repeatedly participate in the Shizuoka Round (former member of the Board of Education living in Shizuoka Prefecture who participated in subtheme B).

As mentioned above, school management was discussed positively based on educational practices in the round table of subtheme B. According to the comments above, the participants were pleased to learn about educational practices in different fields, review their own careers and ways of thinking, and have deep discussions to understand educational practices better, while they built positive relationships with others. In this way, learning peculiar to the Shizuoka Round was generated.

4. Second Shizuoka Round

The second Shizuoka Round was held as a full-day program on November 23, 2014, with the theme, “Cultivation of communities that support teachers and schools, in which the residents learn from each other: Redesigning educational heritages.” The members of the CPHTE that was established in this fiscal year planned and managed the round.

On this occasion, the targets included “persons involved in educational and learning activities other than school education.” The first reason for the expansion was that because of the actual status of teachers in Japan, we wanted to provide an opportunity for many people to confirm the value of their own activities by talking and listening to others in different fields and understand the significance and importance of teachers’ duties. The second reason was that, regarding the training of school management skills, we wanted to provide an opportunity for many people to think about the training of school management skills while meetings with local residents were in process for the creation of schools that coexist with local communities (Shibue, Shimada, Nakamura, and Mitsuya, 2015). However, we also made the most of the characteristic of the Shizuoka Round, which was “people belonging to various fields and positions gather beyond their localities, talk to each other, listen to each other, and learn together on school education and educational practices” (Shibue et al., 2015, p. 169).

The largest number of participants was teachers (including graduate students). Other participants included supervisors, school executives, office workers, university teachers, the superintendent of education of one city, the former Chairperson of the Board of Education of one city, coordinators of school support area headquarters, community center staff members, practitioners of local activities, PTA officials, volunteer association staff members, officers concerned in social education, students, and graduate students. The participants’ impressions² are described below.

- It was extremely interesting to know activities in other prefectures and university teachers’ extra-curricular activities, which were hardly heard in my daily live. Hearing educational practices made me find the commonality with my previous and future

activities and get a clue to expand my problem consciousness. I could also find learning existing in educational practices, which was hardly found in theories. A lecture held before the round table helped me learn in the round table.

- It was pleasurable to participate in the Shizuoka Round. I enjoyed listening to educational practices which far exceeded my vague thinking about teacher education at universities. I have a new appreciation of the importance that all adults rear children. In particular, by this way, adults become true adults.
- I deeply appreciate that I was invited to such a wonderful conference as a reporter. I think I could finally understand the real meaning of lifetime learning. I really feel that lifetime learning is extremely attractive.

It was clear that the participants expanded their consciousness of the problem by learning from the educational practices of persons in different areas and fields. By knowing each other's educational practices, the participants seemed to understand the importance of rearing children while creating a network and the way of learning to do so.

In contrast, an opportunity was provided to review the activities in the Shizuoka Round critically. While learning from rounds at the University of Fukui, Utsunomia University, and Osaka Kyoiku University, and trying to understand the meaning, value, design, and method of "talking to each other, listening to each other, and learning together on educational practices," we recognized that an exchange of opinions is our future task (Umezawa, 2015).

5. Third Shizuoka Round

The third Shizuoka Round will be held on November 23, 2015, and its theme will be "Cultivation of communities that support teachers and schools, in which the residents learn from each other: Review of education in the past for its future." According to the members of the CPHTE who planned and managed the second round, the participants identified the following problems with the Shizuoka Round, in addition to those pointed out in Section 3: (1) the need for organizational improvement in universities (cooperation between the university and its graduate school and among the faculty), and (2) the need for cooperation between universities and external organizations (Shibue et al., 2015).

Although we have attempted repeatedly to solve these problems, this section addresses problem (1) above: cooperation between the university and its graduate school. A member of the CPHTE who was responsible for planning and managing the second round, and was in charge of a course at the Graduate School of Education, decided to

ask five second-year graduate students from the course to report at the third Shizuoka Round. The report will be composed primarily of their activities after entering graduate school (learning that led to capacity development as professionals, including action research³). The five students accepted the proposal, and we conducted a practice round. Based on this experience, the five students are now creating their reports for the third Shizuoka Round.

The five students have already participated in and reported at other rounds. While exchanging opinions with a trainee who has already participated in a round and reported at two rounds, we found that the trainee had acquired the ability to transmit his activities and vision to people in other fields or those who live in other areas in an easily comprehensible manner, and demonstrated the ability to accept, understand, and absorb others' way of thinking, and to manage a round systematically based on his experience in other rounds.

These abilities may be included as school management skills necessary for “core mid-career teachers who possess highly practical leadership” that will be cultivated in our graduate school of education and among “school leaders who possess a certain theory of student guidance, excellent practical skills, and applicability essential as teachers, etc., who are able to play a leading role in their communities and schools” and who are involved in the redefined mission.

The cooperator council report on the execution of immediate measures to improve teachers' abilities, entitled “Reform and improvement of teacher education at the graduate school level” (2013), stated that “teachers' abilities as school leaders include the ability to lead other teachers in a team when encountering a school problem and management skills. To develop the teachers' abilities, in-service teachers must learn expert knowledge again and must review their educational practices based on theories;” further, “in-service teachers must comprehensively understand the entire education at schools and in communities; and must acquire the ability to exert leadership in a wide range of fields, the abilities to collaborate with colleagues and to accurately cope with a problem as an organization, and the communication ability to smoothly cooperate with local communities.”

An exploration of the scope of the management skills that are necessary for core mid-career teachers and school leaders, and the methods required to develop those skills, requires a separate discussion. Nonetheless, in the context of a round, teachers can acquire abilities by being loosely related to professionals not only in the same field, but

also those in different areas and fields, and by learning together with these professionals. These abilities may be included in management skills. Moreover, a round may provide the place to “learn how to learn as teachers who continuously learn,” which will result in the “training of school management skills.”

6. Conclusion

For three years, we have held the Shizuoka Round by trial and error. During that period, we found that our initial goal, that “university teachers and education center supervisors of the whole country, who address themselves to reform pre-service and in-service teacher training, including the training of school management skills, exchange their frank opinions” has gradually changed. We also discovered the method and venue of a round are useful in the cultivation of school leaders.

The initial targets of the Shizuoka Round needed not only an opportunity to exchange their frank opinions, but also an opportunity to exchange information about their activities with those of people in various areas and fields and examine those activities from various perspectives. If the Shizuoka Round is held regularly, it will be our task⁴ to examine the development of a program in which the participants can experience a round to exchange their opinions with both people in other areas and fields and those in the same area and profession (Graduate School of Education, University of Fukui, 2015).

Regarding the in-service training and educational programs that are executed through cooperation and collaboration between universities and the Board of Education, we will provide a round table where participants can learn about the activities of students in graduate schools of education, with participation from members of the Board of Education.

The Shizuoka Round can provide an opportunity for university teachers to examine and improve educational practices in order to build an “integrated system for pre-service and in-service teacher training.” To realize this goal, we must make every effort to improve the quality of the Shizuoka Round. For example, we will consider providing an opportunity to examine each university’s round based on its educational practices in the Collaboration for Reconstruction of Teacher Education.

ENDNOTES

1. These impressions were extracted from (1) *Graduate School of Education Newsletter 59* edited, published, and printed by the Department of Professional Development of Teachers, Graduate School of Education, University of Fukui; (2)

- participation reports obtained by several participants in the Shizuoka Round, and (3) questionnaires administered to the participants in the afternoon symposium.
2. In the second Shizuoka Round, participants were given time to write a “review sheet.” The impressions presented above were extracted from these review sheets (excluding those that stated, “I do not want my review sheet to be inserted in the report”).
 3. Their action research may produce suggestions for improving school organizations that may be presented to the Board of Education. For example, positive mental health at schools, cooperation between school and social education, organizing a curriculum, cooperation between kindergarten and elementary schools, and career formation in senior high school arts courses have been pursued.
 4. In fiscal year 2015, Shizuoka University opened Kigai-juku to train supervisors as part of a project in the teacher training model curriculum in the National Center for Teachers’ Development. In Kigai-juku, a place where “fellows” learn collaborates with one in which educational practices performed by other occupational categories in other areas are described and heard. What type of capacity will be acquired by providing such a learning opportunity is considered valuable to examine.

REFERENCES

- Report on Collaboration for Reconstruction of Teacher Education: Expansion and Deepening of Round Table 2014. (2015). Edited and published by the Department of Professional Development of Teachers, Graduate School of Education, University of Fukui.
- Shibue, K., Shimada, K., Nakamura, M. and Mitsuya, M. (2015). Approach to advanced teacher education: Looking back toward the Practical Study Round Table in Shizuoka 2014. *Bulletin of Shizuoka University Educational Practice Comprehensive Center*, 23, 169–178.
- Umezawa, O. (2015). Direction of the Practical Study Round Table in Shizuoka: Its purpose, results, and problems. *Graduate School of Education Newsletter* 71, 29–31. Edited, published, and printed by the Department of Professional Development of Teachers, Graduate School of Education, University of Fukui.
- Graduate School of Education Newsletter* No. 59. (2015). Edited, published, and printed by the Department of Professional Development of Teachers, Graduate School of Education, University of Fukui.