

The Training Standard of Qualified Student-teachers and How to Improve the Training

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ABSTRACT

Qualified primary and secondary education teachers should have a strong sense of societal responsibility, professionalism, the ability to study independently, solid subject knowledge, strong teaching ability and adept teaching skills. All these qualities will make students qualified teachers right after they graduate. Currently normal universities have many problems in terms of training student-teachers, which goes against training qualified primary and secondary education teachers. Therefore, evolution is necessary in training student-teachers.

Keyword: Qualified student-teachers, Sense of societal responsibility, Professionalism, Ability to study independently, Ability of practice, Teaching skills

Introduction

In China, some normal universities have been in the transition to comprehensive university with the decreasing enrollment ratio of student-teachers and expanding ratio of non-teaching majors. However, in the direction of running school, the majority of provincial normal universities and colleges still insist on the feature of normal university and teacher education. It is a positive tendency that these universities still take training qualified student-teachers as their basic objective and mission. However, what is the training standard of qualified student-teachers? How to train qualified student-teachers? Different universities vary in concepts and practice. This paper reports that the basic objective of training undergraduate student-teachers is that students will have sense of societal responsibility, ability of practice and innovation spirit and students will become qualified primary and secondary education teachers right after they graduate.

Sense of Societal Responsibility and Professionalism are the Core in Student-teacher Training

Mind, character and dedication are highly required to be a teacher because teachers are responsible for shaping human beings and cultivating youth. If professionals who are to

shape human beings have flaws in their mind and character, the entire education cause will head to failure. Qualified primary and secondary education teachers should have a strong sense of societal responsibility, professionalism and excellent work ethics. Teachers should love the education cause, students and teaching work, which is the primary standard and requisite to become a teacher. No matter in China or in other countries and no matter in the past or in modern times, primary and secondary education have always witnessed a great number of dedicated and service-oriented model teachers. These teachers' noble spirits do good to a generation of students and they are also models for practitioners in various occupations. The yearly national excellent teachers in China, especially national teacher models and "the Most Beautiful Village Teacher", are typical examples in modern times. From this point of view, sense of societal responsibility and professionalism are the core of student-teacher training, and are also the primary standard and objective of training student-teachers.

Currently there is a great lack in raising student-teachers' awareness of societal responsibility and professionalism and the reason is as follows.

Students don't have solid subject thinking and occupation thinking. Many Students don't have enough motivation to do teaching work and they are not willing to commit to teaching. For many students, choosing teaching majors in college is just an expediency. Such students make a great percentage in all the student-teachers and there are not many students who would like to do teaching for their entire career time. According to my survey, within one major in a regional normal university, many junior student-teachers who don't need to pay tuition decided to renege on their promise when they graduate. These students in the survey either wanted to get admission into prestigious graduate schools or wanted to engage in other professions and they would rather bear the loss of reneging on their promise. Based on the contract signed upon admission, students are required to work in the school within the specified district for at least ten years. These students can apply for education master degree after they work full time for two years but they cannot pursue master degrees in other categories. If students renege on this contract, they will need to pay one and a half of their tuition which equals RMB 70000 for a common major. If we deeply reflect on this phenomenon, we will find what a serious crisis lies in the future of primary and secondary education.

In profession selections, teacher especially primary and secondary school teacher is not the popular occupation at all. Every year, teacher recruitment in every region and every school is very popular and full of applicants. However, this flourishing recruitment is caused by big employment pressure and poor employment environment. Many

graduates choose to get employment first and then try to change their job. Therefore, this is only a superficial prosperity. With the social values diversified and individual opportunities increased, many youth are not willing to become a teacher or they don't have enough motivation to do the teaching work. In their opinion, being a teacher is not paid well, nor given enough emphasis. They also think that teachers are unknown to public nor feel sense of achievement. In addition, teachers have to work hard for a long time with a huge responsibility and the working process is boring and trivial. According to some investigations, the first profession choice for current college graduates including student-teachers is government official, public service official or foreign company employee, but not primary and secondary school teacher. They prefer to go to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and such metropolises rather than go to small towns or villages. This profession orientation seriously affects some young teachers' profession motivation and the establishment of their professionalism. For many young teachers, working as a teacher in primary and secondary school is just a passive selection or expediency. If there is no active selection, there will be no motivation to work nor sense of responsibility, let alone professionalism.

Young teachers in primary and secondary schools are faced with strong temptation from other professions. These years, primary and secondary school teachers in China are becoming younger. Young and middle aged teachers are making a bigger percentage in education of all levels and categories and they have been the major body in primary and secondary school teachers. Young primary and secondary school teachers have many strengths and advantages. They have solid basic knowledge in a broader sense; they have more new knowledge and they have more approaches and channels to acquire new knowledge; they have new concepts on life and new thinking on problems; they are adventurous and dynamic. Young teachers' education background is improving year by year and the ratio of high-degree teachers is increasing, which means that the overall teachers' quality is improving. However, young primary and secondary school teachers still have many problems and drawbacks. In terms of motivation and enthusiasm on work, some young teachers are not self-motivated and lack sense of profession pride and happiness. They are not dedicated enough nor do they put enough energy into teaching. In some sense, this is a common problem. In terms of morality and behavior, some young teachers lack self-discipline, awareness of collectivism and sense of responsibility; some teachers cannot set examples for students; some other teachers take too many other jobs and don't put their mind on teaching and students. Even some young teachers have problems on profession and academic integrity and they make use of their position for private interests. All the behaviors above seriously undermine young teachers' image and directly influence education quality in primary and

secondary school.

Problems call for change and evolution. However, it is for sure that the change and improvement in sense of responsibility and professionalism is very difficult because this is about shaping people's belief and soul and strengthening people's motivation to work. And this might be the most difficult thing in the world. In many years' education practice, insisting on the concept of "Build ethics and Cultivate people", Shanxi Normal University gives special emphasis on student-teachers' sense of societal responsibility and professionalism and achieves sound accomplishment. In all our practice of education evolution, two points should be emphasized.

In the first place, we put the building of teachers' professional thoughts and professionalism into the whole process of undergraduate study. The building of student-teachers' professionalism is not one single teacher's task, nor the objective of one single subject, but the responsibility of all teachers and all subjects teaching. The power of one teacher and one subject is limited, but all teachers in all subjects will make a strong mind power. Students will be exposed in this power and build their belief and professionalism as teachers. Our university emphasizes that all faculty working with student-teachers should have the awareness of teachers and training teachers and that these faculty should undertake the responsibility for training teachers. Every faculty member in teaching majors should know that their teaching is different from teaching in other majors: their teaching is not only spreading knowledge, but training teachers.

Secondly, we improve student-teachers' dedication and professionalism through sending them to primary and secondary schools in villages for "Aid Education Internship". Since 2005, Shanxi Normal University have established 45 "Education Innovation Experimental Districts" in 11 cities, 610 practice schools and sent out 10752 student-teachers in 16 rounds from 12 disciplines to these schools for one-semester "Aid Education Internship". These practice schools are mostly in villages and poorly conditioned. Through such tough "Aid Education Internship", students chastened their volitional quality and strengthened their sense of societal responsibility and work ethics. They also built up their dedication and benevolence, improving their state of mind. At the same time, students changed a lot in their viewpoint on employment and some students have worked in those practice schools. With the efforts above, the employment rate of graduates in teaching majors from Shanxi Normal University have always been high and advanced in Shanxi Province. Except for those who are admitted into graduate schools, the percentage of graduates in teaching majors who went to teach in primary and secondary schools or other education institutions is over 70%.

The Ability to Study Independently is the Key to Student-teacher Training

Not only should qualified primary and secondary education teachers have sense of responsibility and professionalism, but have solid subject knowledge, the ability to study independently and critical thinking. All these are basic requirement for doing teaching work. When people discussed about teachers' qualities before, profession quality and subject knowledge were strongly emphasized, which is undoubtedly correct. Profession quality and subject knowledge are one of core abilities for a teacher to do teaching. However, in modern times, what is more important for a teacher, is not his subject knowledge, but his ability to acquire those profession quality and subject knowledge, also his ability to study independently. This depends on the development of modern knowledge and science technology. The development and innovation of science technology is the most important feature of modern society: knowledge on science technology updates faster and faster and knowledge and information also spread faster and faster. Information technology and the Internet totally change people's study and communication. In modern times, if a person doesn't keep studying, he will be left behind; if a person doesn't have the ability to study independently, he will also be left behind. For an undergraduate student-teacher, four-year study can only build a necessary knowledge foundation but cannot cover all subject knowledge. Without the ability to study independently, a student-teacher will not be able to adapt himself to the future teaching work and will be left behind soon.

The current problem in our subject education is the neglect in building students' ability to study independently and the direct reason for this problem is the rigescent classroom teaching mode which is commonplace in almost all Chinese universities' classroom. The main characteristics of this rigescent classroom teaching mode are: (1) Faculty talk in the whole class and they seem to be the promulgator for correct answers and verity only. They do so under the influence of long-time formed education concept and they just regard students as passive knowledge recipients. (2) Students have few opportunities to participate in class discussion, questioning and thinking and students are actually passive recipients in class. The classroom atmosphere in Chinese universities is generally oppressive and this situation is caused by this rigescent teaching mode. (3) Students don't have enough opportunities for independent study and lack this ability. Current Chinese college students do poorly in their ability and quality. One thing is their reading is extremely limited and they almost never read any book other than their textbooks. And college students' writing is poor and many students don't know how to write papers. Writing assignment just reminds them of downloading

or pasting from the Internet and many students' works are downloaded from the Internet. Another thing is the lack of the awareness and ability to study independently. Current college students don't know how to study and their ability to study independently is poor. (4) Students lack the practice for critical thinking, questioning and innovation and creativity training is suppressed. Chinese college students seldom question teachers in class. One reason is the long-time formed, simple and tedious learning habit. The other reason is that students never do independent research and thinking on many issues, which in turns makes them have no questions.

So how can we avoid drawbacks in college education and student-teacher training and improve the effectiveness of this training? Based on the analyses above, I think the most urgent issue is to change class full of teacher's talk into student-centered class with inter-communication between students and teacher. Specifically, we need to change teachers' methodology, students' learning method and the assessment on students' schoolwork.

Teachers should change their teaching method and give class back to students, making a real student-centered class. This change is not abstruse, but practical. With primary and secondary education evolution going on for decades, middle schools and high schools in many regions have created student-centered class and made great achievements. Through the evolution, not only do students greatly improve their learning ability and comprehensive quality, but schools witness big progress in national college entrance examination. Now that middle schools can achieve a lot in classroom evolution, universities can also make such achievement. The research on the classroom teaching mode in University of Oxford and University of Cambridge shows that British students' ability and quality is firstly resulted from class discussion and interaction. For instance, students in University of Oxford have strong public speaking ability and the ability to independently solve problems, which is directly due to their classroom teaching mode and their frequent discussion and interaction in class. The classroom teaching mode in University of Oxford is one mode with the major aim of building students' ability to study independently, which is not a class with only teacher's teaching, but a class with interaction and discussion between teacher and students; which is not a class just for spreading knowledge, but for building students' ability to think and study independently; which is not a place where teachers announce standard or correct answers, but a class where students and teachers explore, think and criticize together. In class, students have plenty of time and opportunities to display their talents, demonstrate their opinions and express their criticism and doubt. Active classroom atmosphere is a prominent characteristic of the class in University of Oxford. As Palfreyman (2011) stated, "The

core of tutorial system is a theory which will teach students to think independently. Tutors free students to explore and clearly express their understanding on one topic. In the discussion under tutorial system, students should benefit from sparing no efforts to defend for their position” (p.35). Palfreyman (2011) also stated that “Tutorial system encourages students to actively, not passively, develop their ability to study and work independently and the skill to analyze and criticize” (p.35). From his opinion, if each class allows the interaction between teacher and students and provides opportunities for students to question and speak, students’ abilities and qualities will gradually grow up.

In the past three years, Shanxi Normal University implemented “student-centered” classroom teaching evolution and has made some achievement. Currently, more than 100 subjects are applying and implementing classroom teaching evolution and some teachers are conducting the trail and practice of this evolution. Not only does this ongoing evolution have a higher requirement for students, but requires more for faculty and forces faculty to study on problems more carefully. In other words, both teaching and learning are promoted. Our next task is to establish normative curriculum standard and avoid classroom teaching evolution from teachers’ capricious arrangement.

Students should change their learning method and take independent study as the dominant learning mode. One document shows that undergraduates and graduates in the United States do extraordinarily much reading in and out of their class. In the United States, each instructor will assign a great quantity of reading to their students based on the course requirement; students need to do more than 400 pages of reading every week and finish reading response. Great quantities of reading builds the solid foundation of subject knowledge for students. All universities in the U.K. put emphasis on students’ independent reading and University of Oxford does best in this field. Students reading is directly related to tutorial system in University of Oxford or we can think that it is an element of tutorial system. Undergraduates in University of Oxford need to take 2 or 3 tutor’s class every week. Their tutor will give a long bibliography and each tutor’s class requires students to submit a paper of 2000 to 3000 words. In order to finish this writing assignment, students have to read a great deal of classic literature and related documents. Palfreyman (2011) proved this practice: “The weekly teaching under tutorial system gradually covers all or almost all syllabus requirements, which does mean that the majority of students in University of Oxford will carefully read through all required readings on syllabus” (p.62). It is worthy for us to learn from the U.S. and the U.K. that they emphasize the training on college students’ reading and writing ability. And their higher education proves that excellent students should have excellent reading and writing skills. Reading is a process in which we have independent communication,

dialogue, thinking and improvement with others and the external world. And writing is a process in which we organize, summarize and dig our thinking. In order to improve student-teacher training, the improvement in reading and writing-centered independent study is a necessary step.

We should also change the assessment on students' schoolwork. Similar to the rigid classroom teaching mode, the assessment on students' schoolwork is also monotonous and keeps the form of summative assessment. In essence, such classroom teaching mode and assessment takes students as a totally passive object. Students can hardly engage themselves in classroom teaching, nor do they have many opportunities to discuss and interact with instructors, which therefore makes them lack interest in class. In recent years, many universities in China have changed their monotonous assessment on students' schoolwork such as cancelling 100-scale, which is constructional. However, the specific assessment form still needs exploring and perfecting and only cancelling 100-scale cannot solve all problems.

Ability of Practice and Teaching Skills are the Base Stone for Student-teacher Training

When we are evaluating current college students' ability, the education professionals have a consensus that what those college students need most is innovation and ability of practice, which just hits the point. If we judge student-teachers in universities based on the standard of a qualified middle school teacher, these student-teachers lack the new education and teaching concept required by classroom teaching evolution and they also lack basic teaching ability and skills.

In fact, teaching itself is a skill and craft. Like many skills and crafts such as acting skills, sports skills and some traditional handicraft, teaching skills also need special training and takes long-time accumulation. All in all, student-teacher training is an issue of practice. Similar to building up sense of societal responsibility, professionalism and the ability to study independently, the practice of teaching skills also reflects the basic goal, core and content of teacher education. The goal of teacher education is to train students to be qualified teachers and a qualified teacher must have all-round and proficient teaching skills. What teaching skills a teacher should have is not easy to answer. With the development of society and progress in science technology, there will be more and higher requirement for teachers' teaching skills. According to general teaching practice in primary and secondary school, teachers' basic teaching skills include language expression, writing, classroom teaching organizing, working as a head

teacher, out-of-class activity organizing, education art, emotion and communication. In modern times, teaching skills should also include computer operation, multimedia courseware making and the ability to apply the Internet resources to teaching. Therefore, only in terms of teaching skills, to be a qualified teacher in primary and secondary school is not easy and takes tough practice.

Teaching skills are not born with, but takes practice. How to train teaching skills is an important topic that teacher education evolution should focus on. The major problems in current teacher education, especially in training before profession are: (1) education theory is seriously disjointed with education practice and the courses in pedagogy and psychology are not closely related with teaching practice; (2) education theory is relatively given more emphasis and the practice of teaching skills is ignored, which leads to the fact that many graduates lack basic teaching skills and employment competitiveness and that they cannot become qualified teachers. When faced with such problems, the value of education practice concept should be underscored. Teacher education is essentially an education for practice and is an education activity with much practice. And the direct goal of teacher education is to train people who will work in primary and secondary education. As an education for practice, teacher education should not just talk about theory and principle, but focus on improving teachers' quality in practice. It takes practice to build up teachers' sense of societal responsibility and professionalism and so does to the practice of teaching skills. From what we learned, most students in education internship do not have problems in subject knowledge, but have problems in teaching skills and managing students. For instance, some students never understand what teaching is: facing students and textbooks, they don't know how to set up their teaching. Most students are not familiar with middle school curriculum standard, lack the norm awareness of curriculum, cannot control the depth of their teaching content or even mistakes middle school curriculum as college curriculum. All these totally go against the regular pattern in education.

In the last decade, in the process of teacher education evolution, Shanxi Normal University have put strong emphasis on building up and practicing student-teachers' teaching skills and made prominent achievement. There are two major aspects we are working on: (1) we reinforce the practice of teaching skills within college and put this practice into regular course work; (2) we require students for more internship and improve the effectiveness of internship. Firstly, in order to practice student-teachers' teaching skills, our university built teaching skills training laboratory. All discipline theory instruction will cover the practice of teaching skills just like science students do experiments in laboratory. The effectiveness of such practice is very prominent: students

can observe themselves when they do teaching in experiments and they can also do peer observation, communicate and improve in group study. Secondly, our university extends student-teachers' internship to one semester and send students directly to primary and secondary schools for teaching practice. Through teaching in primary and secondary schools and the exchange and communication with those formal teachers, students' teaching skills are greatly improved. From the practice of "Aid Education Internship", we also realize that it is not subject knowledge required by teaching in primary and secondary schools that students lack, but the concept and skills that it takes to teach effectively. Students improve their teaching skills through "Aid Education Internship" and most students have completed the transition to mature teachers: not only do they know how to teach and manage students, but they can do well in teaching and managing students. At the same time, students updated their education concept. The concepts of practice, innovation and individualized education have been internalized in every student after their internship. More importantly, students who finished "Aid Education Internship" have a great advantage in employment.

The practice of teacher education evolution tells us that the key to improving student-teachers' teaching skills is to strengthen practice. From the practice in many schools, establishing standard teaching skills practice system, innovating teaching skills practice system and emphasizing the practice of students' teaching skills are an effective method to improve students' teaching skills and ability of practice. With such systematic practice, students have had some basic ability to do teaching in primary and secondary education when they are still in college. And students will be qualified teachers upon taking the position as a formal teacher, rather than push the task to learn to be a teacher back to post graduation. Educators and administrators in normal universities must have such belief and awareness: through the education in university, students will become qualified teachers upon graduation; they should have the basic ability to do teaching work and they should be "completed products". Pushing the commitment of training teaching skills to primary and secondary schools means ignoring the responsibility of a normal university. However, the issue of how graduates from normal universities grow up to be an excellent teacher or a renowned teacher in primary and secondary teacher is related with a person's practice and training in his lifetime, but not the responsibility of normal university.

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