

Adversity in teacher education in Japan: Professional development or professional impoverishment?

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This paper aims to discuss teacher education in Japan. In pre-service education, the curriculum at the Bachelor's degree level has shifted more to an approach that emphasizes reflective practices. Professional schools of teacher education, which have recently been established for the Master's degree level, are supposed to function as a practical course of education, but it is still very unclear how they are different from the existing graduate schools of education. In the domain of in-service training, a teacher license renewal system was recently introduced, but it does not seem to be meaningful because of its cost. Instead of the introduction of license renewal system, it is more efficient and effective for teachers to be united and involved in reforming themselves at every school level in order to create secure learning spaces and communities inside the schools.

Keywords: Teacher education reform; pre-service education; professional schools of teacher education; teacher license renewal system; Japan.

Introduction

'Education is a permanent national policy' is a popular saying in Japan. However, the Japanese government has tortured and hampered the foundations of the country, namely education, for the last 30 years. Since the 1980s, a series of Japanese prime ministers has pursued various neo-liberal and neo-conservative educational policies that have radically changed the educational context to a great extent (Miishi, 2006; Sato, 2000). A system that allows people to choose public schools has been introduced in various cities. Systems for evaluating teachers have also been actively instituted recently, and the working environment for teachers has become more competitive because of, for example, the introduction of promotions to new merit-based positions, the so-called Super Teachers and Chief Teachers, who are regarded as highly competent in teaching and provide technical support to other teachers as mentors. Furthermore, the revision of the Fundamental Law of Education was significant in terms of making schooling education more conservative and nationalistic. A new teacher license renewal system (TLRS) has also been introduced, under which teachers have to take courses and complete assessments of their comprehension of the courses in order to renew their licenses.

Kadowaki (2008) pointed out that these reforms have resulted in a crisis of professionalism for Japanese teachers. In the past, Japan's Ministry of Education

(MOE) upgraded the status of teachers and their training and also recognised the importance of their professional development prior to reforms in other developed countries. For example, pre-service training was moved from secondary-education institutions to tertiary-education institutions in 1949. Then, in a report submitted in 1971, the Central Council of Education (CCE) underlined the status of teaching as a profession and strongly urged for improvements in the status, capacity, and salary of teachers (Miishi, 2006). CCE also emphasised the importance of lifelong development for teachers in the same report (Yamazaki, 2001).

In more recent educational reforms, this perspective of the professionalism of teachers has been lost (Miishi, 2006) as the argument that schools are service providers and parents are consumers has gained popularity (Sato, 2000). This trend began in the early 1980s and was legitimatised under the first market-oriented reform introduced by the Nakasone government. In accordance with reforms by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States, Yasuhiro Nakasone, the prime minister of Japan at the time, opted for smaller government and fought against trade unions, including the teachers' union.

As noted above, the environment in which teachers work is very severe, leading to great debate among scholars about the situation. However, most of these discussions have taken place domestically, and despite the rapid institutional reforms, the issues and challenges facing teachers and their training have not been exposed to international audiences, except in a few studies (Nakayama, Takag, & Imamura, 2010; Ota, 2000). This paper aims to discuss teacher education in Japan, including both pre-service and in-service trainings, based largely on the existing literature. We will focus on three domains: pre-service education at the university level, the recent establishment of professional schools of teacher education (PSTEs), and in-service training at the school level.

Pre-service education

History

Until the end of World War II, teachers in primary schools were only educated in normal schools, and their curriculum was very uniform. To address these limitations, the MOE decided to open the windows of teacher training to various universities, following the so-called 'principle of openness' (Yamazaki, 2001). This meant that teacher-training programmes could take place in both national and private universities. Students who completed the programme were given a teaching license. The license was earned by more than 10 times more students than the number of jobs available, so the competition for employment was tough enough to control the quality and capacity of teachers starting their careers (Sato, 2008).

However, pre-service education in Japan has historically been characterised by some peculiar characteristics. First, universities have been divided into two types: research-oriented and teacher-training-oriented universities. In other countries, both research and training are emphasised even in the top-level, scholastically leading universities. In the beginning, some universities, such as the Universities of Tokyo and Nagoya, envisioned a professional education that included both aspects, but these views were always marginal and eventually vanished (Sato, 2008). Nevertheless, in reality, there was a severe dearth of vision in professional education. The normal schools were upgraded to become national liberal arts universities or faculties of liberal arts within national universities. This

is because strengthening academic and intellectual backgrounds was emphasised, and a liberal arts education was considered the most effective way to achieve this goal (Sato, 2008).

However, there have been serious conflicts among faculty members inside education faculties and universities (Sato, 2008). Faculty members are usually divided into three groups in these institutions: general education, individual subjects, and teacher education. According to Sato (2008), the conflicts between faculty members were embedded from the very beginning in the post-war teacher training system; thus, it was extremely difficult to expect collaboration between faculty members across the different groups. In addition, the budgets for education and research were generally constrained for the faculty members in these institutions.

The participation of private universities created other issues (Katsuno, 2008; Sato, 2008). The number of students has generally been larger in private universities, and teacher training programmes have been popular because they equip students with a teaching license, which provides them with proof of their competence in the labour market. Thus, the number of enrolled students in these courses is usually large, and the quality of interaction between students and faculty members is low. The practicum is also likely to be dependent on the recipient schools, and it is very difficult to control its quality in the hands of individual faculty members. More importantly, in private universities, the number of faculty members in charge of teacher training programmes is often set at a minimum, so their status in the universities and their conditions for research are seriously constrained.

Recent reform

For a long period, the quality of education remained low in the teacher training programmes. With the passage of the National Standards for the Establishment of Universities in 1991, universities became even more deregulated, and the management of each university was allowed to control their education programmes in a more flexible manner. Thus, teacher training programmes were also revised according to the contexts of individual universities and the ideas of their managers. Therefore, it became difficult to form a consensus about what teacher training programmes should be like across universities (Iwata, 2006).

Then, in 2001, the Colloquium on the Future Direction of National Universities and Faculties for Teacher Pre-service Education submitted a report suggesting the restructuring and merger of education universities and faculties, taking them by surprise. Since that time, these institutions have started to review the ways in which they conduct both pre- and in-service training (Yamazaki, 2008). Further, the Japan Association of Universities of Education (JAUE) published a report to recommend a curriculum for pre-service education that would let students experience more reflective practices (Yamazaki, 2008). The MOE also started to provide grants called Good Practices (GP) for pre-service training, for which many universities started to compete. The participants in the competition have tended to be faculty members with a serious commitment to developing collaboration between schools, the local community, and universities and to nurturing future teachers (Iwata, 2006).

Since the recommendation was provided by the JAUE, universities — national, municipal, and private — have started to promote participation of the

students in their early years, to systematise and accredit such activities, and to reform the practicum. They have also strengthened collaboration with local authorities and schools (Yamazaki, 2008). Recent graduates of pre-service training programmes have more practical experiences, so they develop a sense of being practitioners more than graduates did before the 1990s (Iwata, 2006; Murase et al., 2006).

Despite the development and promotion of such reforms in various universities geared towards reflective practices, some challenges still remain. First, universities still struggle with maintaining the quality of the reflective practices (Murase, 2006; Yamazaki, 2006). Students have realisations, and one of the roles of faculty members is to refer them to appropriate theories in education and provide support and advice for the students. However, this is not so easy to do because faculty members do not necessarily have the capacity to appropriately respond to students' problems or issues in a practical manner.

Further, Iwata (2006) pointed out that there is a risk that the meaning of experiences in each programme could be reduced because of too many 'practical' or 'experiential' activities. Likewise, Yamazaki (2008) argued that there is a severe dearth in the programmes of systematic outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and students' capacities. Further, Yamazaki (2008) pointed out how difficult it is for students to have a clear-cut understanding of the contents and standards that they are required to attain. Universities have been unable to clarify these questions, and as a result, students need to define their goals and standards, integrate what they have learned, and memorise key terms for employment examinations.

Moreover, as described above, the faculty members who compete to win a GP grant are likely to be very trustworthy and faithful educators and they engage in the GP competition for their institutional survival. However, the core of the problem is not a matter of each individual university but of the teacher education system in universities as a whole in regards to the contents and framework of their programmes (Iwata, 2006). Thus, universities may trivialise their teacher education programmes by becoming too competitive and eventually exhaust themselves (Iwata, 2006).

Issues surrounding PSTEs

Establishment of PSTEs

On July 11, 2006, the CCE (2006) recommended enhancing the quality of teacher training programmes, establishing PSTEs, and introducing TLRS. This report had a huge impact on teacher education and promoted various systemic changes in in-service teacher training programmes. In this subsection, we will focus on issues surrounding PSTEs; we will cover TLRS in the next subsection. PSTEs were legislated in March 2007 and instituted in 19 universities (15 national and 4 private universities) in April 2008. The total number of students in the universities was 706. By 2011, 25 universities had instituted PSTE courses, affecting 830 students total.

In PSTEs, students take 45 credits within two years, including practicum at schools for 10 credits. Courses that include case studies of practices and field work are also required as part of the curriculum of these programmes. PSTEs have two goals: to develop fresh novice teachers with Bachelor's degrees illustrating their practical competence in teaching and to nurture in-service teachers as school leaders

willing to take up roles as senior managers. The courses, therefore, are designed to achieve different targets, but the targets and courses are supposed to coexist in one organisation. Moreover, these programmes are required to have 40% of their faculty members be ex-practitioners.

Despite significant suggestions in the CCE report, it also had three main problems. First, there was no clear-cut distinction between PSTEs and existing graduate schools of education. Certainly, PSTEs are more practical based on their curriculum, which features field work and case studies, and organisational framework, in which 40% of the faculty members are ex-practitioners. However, the report makes no other statements about the PSTE curriculum. As a result, PSTE tends to duplicate the existing curriculum and domain of programmes within the graduate schools of education.

Second, there is a need to clarify the consistency and coherence between PSTEs and the principle of openness for pre-service education if the target is to develop fresh novice graduates who are practically competent to teach. It is totally unclear what makes PSTE graduates different from students who complete the existing teacher training programmes under the Bachelor's or Associate degree systems. The CCE report addresses the matter as follows:

[translated from the Japanese language]

In the existing system, various types of talents with various backgrounds can participate in teaching jobs, and this will provide diversity to teaching personnel and activate their organisations and practices. Thus, the existing system has a merit and importance in improving the capacities of teachers. At the same time, teaching is a highly professional job, so teachers need to have sufficient expert knowledge and skills in order to provide appropriate instructions according to the levels of children's developmental stages. Therefore, it is important to seek the establishment and enhancement of teachers' expertise and professional capacities, as well as to keep the 'principle of openness for pre-service training'. It should be noted that keeping the 'principle of openness for pre-service training' should not be misunderstood: it does not mean that the pre-service training programme can be easily expanded without care for and attention to its quality or that everybody can be licensed easily (CCE, 2006, ch. 1.5; quote translated by the authors).

According to the report, it is the official view of the CCE that there is no systemic error in the principle of openness itself, and this principle should be kept. However, its management and how universities recognise it have to be changed accordingly.

Third, there is no clear-cut design for the career development of PSTE graduates. In existing graduate schools, a graduate obtains an advanced class licence upon their completion of the course. Then, the graduates are equipped with sufficient expert knowledge and skills to be employed as professionals. The CCE report, however, does not address whether the expertise of PSTE graduates is lower than, equal to, or higher than that of the graduates of existing Master's courses.

Regarding these problems, the MOE (2011) pointed out four differences between PSTE programmes and existing graduate schools. First, it has been legislated that 40% of the faculty members in a PSTE programme should be ex-practitioners. Second, in PSTE programmes, 10 out of 45 credits should be based on practicum in schools or related institutions. Third, while the students in the existing graduate schools of education are engaged in research activities in the

fields in which they majored, it is not compulsory for students to receive supervision on their research or to submit a Master's thesis in PSTEs. Fourth, it is compulsory for the existing graduate schools to go through a certified evaluation and accreditation every seven years, while this process takes place every five years according to subject domains for PSTEs.

The first and second points are about practical aspects of PSTEs embodied by the CCE's report. The third and fourth points were added during the legislation process. The fourth point is understandable because PSTEs need to reflect the needs and trends of public opinions and the views of the government. However, the third point is problematic and provocative because it is an official statement by the government that existing graduate schools are for research, but PSTE programmes are not. Thus, a huge question exists about what kinds of expertise can be guaranteed by PSTEs. The CCE report may imply that being highly practical is the form of expertise gained by PSTE graduates, but it is highly questionable whether such practicality deserves to be called expertise.

Such definitions make it possible to distinguish between the two types of institutions. However, this distinction also leads to the conclusion that existing graduate schools are malfunctioning in terms of providing practical teacher training. Various stakeholders interacted with each other to develop statements in the CCE report, which resulted in vague and shallow organisational designs for PSTE programmes. All in all, policies for teacher training have potentially become very confusing to institutions, faculty members, and students.

Possible ways to reform PSTEs

As reviewed hitherto, there are problems regarding PSTEs from both the perspectives of institutional design and organisational management, but there is also room for its reform and improvement. Since PSTEs are built into the Japanese educational system, it is important to explore better ways of utilising them. In order to better utilise PSTEs, the Minister of Education discussed three points with the CCE regarding the basic function of schools as learning communities: (1) an appropriate length of time for pre-service training (i.e., whether four or six years is more appropriate), whether students who complete the programme should necessarily be awarded a Master's degree, and where it would be appropriate to place PSTEs within the larger pre-service training system; (2) the establishment of a framework for the lifelong professional development of teachers and a system for evaluating it; and (3) how to promote further collaboration with local boards of education. Clarification on these three points would lead to direct improvements to and the development of PSTEs and related pre-service teacher training activities.

First, one ultimate goal would be the establishment of a framework for lifelong professional teacher development that is penetrated by stakeholders and the teachers themselves. This would be the biggest task with the highest priority in educational reform. Originally, lifelong employment was the prevalent custom throughout Japanese society, not only in the education sector. At that time, once new graduates found jobs, they were very likely to work in the same company until retirement. However, this tradition has been rapidly changing, and many workers now are likely to have higher degrees. Likewise, completing the four-year pre-service programmes is not sufficient for getting a job in the education sector. The issue is not merely the length of time it takes to obtain a teaching licence but also the provision of continuous opportunities for continuing education for teachers. It is

therefore important that teachers be able to study at a graduate school not just once but multiple times throughout their careers. If continuing education is appropriately placed in the careers of teachers and a model of teachers' lifelong development is established, the meaning of PSTEs becomes clearer, and the professional development of Japanese teachers is enhanced.

The second task is the relationship between PSTEs and the principle of openness, which is correlated with the first task. The principle of openness originally created a supply of teachers with a variety of backgrounds and democratic views (Sato, 2008), and this principle has not changed a great deal since. The two-year duration of PSTEs would be built on the principle of openness. One must consider how to relate faculties from various universities, including private universities, to PSTEs. The current weakest point of PSTEs is the lack of provision of academically oriented courses, and it is important to collaborate with other faculties in the same or neighbouring universities in order to keep the academic standards of PSTEs high.

The third task is to change the position and role of the local board of education. In the Japanese education system, the boards of education have traditionally sustained the lifelong development of teachers. Japanese teachers shift their positions from classroom teachers to supervisors from time to time and then come back to schools as teachers. Through such experiences, they grow as managers and mid-level leaders. The research centres attached to the boards of education have functioned as places for teachers' growth. Hitherto, the local boards of education have been likely to make a claim to graduate schools in their regions. However, this relationship needs to change to a more equal partnership in order to jointly sustain the lifelong professional growth of teachers. Moreover, the local boards of education are supposed to coordinate between institutions as discussed in the second point. This is because they know what demands exist in academic terms from the teachers' perspectives.

Fourth, collaboration with schools will be an important vehicle for reforming PSTEs. Namely, school-based professional development activities — these have mainly been composed of so-called lesson study (Lewis, Akita, & Sato, 2010), which will be discussed in detail in the next subsection — should be changed and reformed. Teachers could acquire high levels of expertise through lesson study, but this tradition has to be utilised fully to be really effective. At present, regulations state that there should be professional development schools working in collaboration with PSTEs. These collaboration schools are under partnerships to conduct field work or case studies. Such activities are necessary in order to increase students' capacities, but it is also true that the amount of labour required for teachers at collaboration schools is immense. Thus, it would be more cost-effective and realistic to have partnerships with the original PSTEs in which students were enrolled. Then, interaction with PSTEs would contribute to the enrichment of lesson study in those schools. By so doing, the effectiveness of education in PSTEs would be strengthened, and reciprocity would be more firmly built through collaboration with students' original schools.

Conditions for reform

PSTEs have great potential, as described above. However, in order to make this a reality, some conditions must be fulfilled. The first condition is a change in the social structure. The lifelong learning of teachers cannot be achieved merely

through the efforts of educators and officers in education, but it can be achieved with more flexibility and mobility for employees to appreciate such continuing education. Moreover, professionals, including teachers, who keep growing throughout their lives have to be well-respected and receive better salaries. Otherwise, it is hardly possible to attract the necessary talent into the teaching profession.

Second, it should be stressed that reflecting on practices underlies the lifelong growth of teachers. Many concepts are discussed regarding PSTE — practical capacities for instruction, high expertise, ever-growing teachers, case studies, and field work — but these are all shallow and meaningless without the essence of reflection. By reflecting on practice, teachers are able to understand the complexities of practices and appreciate the depth and blend of difficulty and pleasure that comes along with them. This view of the importance of reflection must penetrate into both school sites and PSTEs.

Third, the concept of ‘being practical’ should be reconstructed. High-quality reflection would help teachers continue to grow throughout their lives, but this does not simply mean increasing their knowledge or the number of teaching periods. Being highly practical means having a deep understanding of education, a high capacity to make decisions in improvisational and autonomic manners, and possessing profound sincerity in questioning their own actions. Such insights, based on the realities in classrooms and schools, are the basis for constructing pedagogy and educational studies that are needed now and in accordance with which PSTEs should be structured. PSTEs are not only a matter of systemic design but also of refined pedagogy and educational studies.

Issues surrounding in-service training

In Japan, there are mainly three sources that plan and conduct professional development activities for teachers, besides the training provided in graduate schools, as discussed in the previous subsection. The first source of training is the periodic one provided by the government. These trainings are conducted during the first, fifth, 10th, and 20th years of a teacher’s career. If teachers are promoted to higher positions, they must complete additional training offered by the government. The second type of training is offered by private networks, such as teachers’ unions and self-learning circles. Japanese teachers are actively and voluntarily involved in these organisations, and they learn from their colleagues through participating in them. The third type of training is school-based and comes in multiple forms: lectures by scholars or bureaucrats, lesson study, or a combination of the two. In this subsection, we will focus on TLRS, which has been an urgent issue in the field of in-service training and lesson study that has attracted international attention as an approach for school-based professional development.

TLRS: An outcome of mistrust of teachers

As discussed in the introduction, the teaching environment has become increasingly competitive and high pressure. As a part of this trend, the National Commission on Educational Reform, which was directly under the Japanese prime minister, began to discuss TLRS at the end of the 1990s, though it was not actually introduced until 2009. The goal of TLRS is the exclusion of the least competent teachers, but in the midst of the process of formulating TLRS, it was portrayed as a ‘renewal’ of

teachers' knowledge so they could stay abreast of the latest trends in society and education.

Since the 1980s, some extreme and exceptional cases of inappropriate teachers, such as stealing, violence, and sexual crimes, have been in the news media (Imazu, 2009), which has also come down strongly against the teachers' union. Then, a series of prime ministers from the Liberal Democratic Party took a hawkish attitude towards teachers, and conservative politicians and other critics largely came to share this view. There are many problems in the framework and contents of TLRS, but the conservative politicians sought to introduce it anyway, even without proper justification and without taking the time to carefully demarcate it from other existing in-service training activities (Imazu, 2009).

The framework of TLRS is as follows; every 10 years, teachers have to apply for TLRS by themselves online, and once they are admitted, they must take 30 hours of lectures. Teachers must bear the cost of their training: each lecture costs around 1,000 yen (about US\$8), for a total of about 30,000 yen (around US\$240). However, if teachers work in a remote area, they also have to stay in accommodations near the training venues, which is an additional cost. There is no financial support for teachers, and they have to pay all the costs by themselves. After completing the courses, teachers must pass a series of examinations in order to have their licence renewed. The number of teachers taking the courses for TLRS in 2010/2011 was targeted at 100,000 (Imazu, 2009), and 94,488 teachers actually did so. Of those, 93,898 teachers (99.38%) successfully renewed their licences (MOE, 2011).

Another issue with TLRS is that teachers from various subject backgrounds at both the primary and secondary levels are joining the system, so it has been very difficult to supply courses that are appropriate to the participants. Miura (2010) discussed a case in which a teacher of fine arts had to attend a course for teachers in social studies because the university where TLRS was held lacked the appropriate capacity for a fine arts course.

There are plenty of problems and issues with TLRS, but we will focus on three points: the exclusion of inappropriate teachers, using TLRS as training, and the providers of TLRS. First, the biggest challenge is that teachers can lose their licence if they fail to pass the TLRS exams, despite the similarity of TLRS to the previous in-service training provided by the government. There is a strong doubt about the capacity of such examinations to capture the real competency of teachers, and sincere and dedicated teachers tend to feel frustrated by this problem, which is embedded in TLRS (Miura, 2010). Instead, their daily efforts need to be assessed, and a teacher evaluation system would be more suitable for that purpose (Ushito, 2008).

Second, in TLRS, teachers have to attend 'dissemination' types of lectures, rather than lectures whose contents have been customised according to their needs. Moreover, the number of participants in a course can sometimes be around 100 or even more. The lecturers are usually university faculty members, but many of them are not necessarily very familiar with the actual conditions teachers face in schools (Imazu, 2009). Thus, it is extremely doubtful whether training such as TLRS can provide meaningful experiences to seasoned teachers who have been working for 10 years or more (Ushito, 2008). Throughout their careers, teachers learn through the course of their work and school-based professional development activities, and there is no

evidence that attending a series of lectures for 30 hours every 10 years is better than school-based learning (Kubo, 2008).

Third, TLRS is a huge challenge to universities, which are likely to be its suppliers (Kubo, 2008). University faculty members tend to provide lectures during their vacation periods, which requires them to reduce the time they have to do their own research and to prepare for the classes they teach at the university. Even worse, they have to provide the TLRS participants with clear-cut goals, syllabi, and rubrics in order for them to be accountable, but this forces faculty members to spend too much time and labour on preparing for TLRS (Imazu, 2009).

Lesson study for learning community: A way out

School-based lesson study has been a major source of professional development in Japan. Yamazaki (2002) conducted a questionnaire survey three times in 1984, 1989, and 1994, covering around 1,500 people each time. About 30% of the participants responded that lesson study in their schools was the major source of their professional development. Lesson study is an approach to professional learning that emphasises mutual observation and reflection as well as planning. Teachers usually lead lesson study by themselves; sometimes they invite faculty members from universities or supervisors from the local or central authorities, but this only happens occasionally.

Lesson study is a process consisting of the following steps: (1) collaboratively planning a lesson, (2) observing the implementation of the lesson, (3) discussing the lesson, (4) revising the lesson plan (optional), (5) teaching the revised version of the lesson (optional), and (6) sharing opinions and views on the revised version of the lesson (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004, pp. 7-9). This is a conventional style of lesson study, which can be seen in a large number of schools in Japan. Teachers have examined their curriculum and practices from an early period and constructed the traditions of teacher research. The school-based practice of lesson study dates back to the 1920s.

However, there are also some limitations to this type of conventional lesson study. First, teachers are more likely to discuss teaching plans and form a consensus regarding them. This unifies the teaching ideas and may lead to conformity in teaching, despite the variety of teachers' original ideas and their growth needs, as well as differing characteristics of the children they teach. Moreover, this process of conformity is likely to be political, depending on power relations in the school. Further, teachers' capacities and strengths differ, and unified plans may suppress or kill some of the teachers' best characteristics (Inagaki & Sato, 1996).

Second, by taking this approach, there are fewer chances for observation and reflection because so much time is spent on joint planning. There is no perfect teaching plan, however much the teachers may polish it up. Teachers need to see how a plan is implemented and what kinds of experiences children have with it. Children are likely to respond to teaching in various ways, sometimes beyond the teachers' expectations. Then, a teacher who teaches — and also observes — is challenged regarding how to respond to children's ideas or remarks in an improvisational manner. This capacity can only be strengthened through real lessons, not planning.

The third limitation is particularly applicable to the secondary level: if lesson study is organised according to subject, it is likely to cause a schism inside the

schools. Such a division could cause teachers to focus more on subject matters and teaching methods than on children and their learning. Schools are likely to be segregated according to subject departments, and there would be few dialogues across these boundaries.

In order to overcome these limitations and challenges to teachers in Japanese contexts, Sato and his colleagues have developed the ideas and practices of lesson study for learning community (LSLC) (Ose and Sato, 2000, 2003; Sato, 2006; Sato and Sato, 2003). Ose and Sato (2003) summarise the basic principles of LSLC as follows: first, schools should be developed into a communities in which every single child can experience high-quality learning, every single teacher can grow as a professional, and as many parents and local citizens as possible can participate in learning. Second, every teacher should invite colleagues to observe and offer reflections on their teaching at least once a year, in order to share their classroom practices with them and engage in mutual learning by analysing one another's practice. Third, a listening and dialogical relationship must be established among the members of a school in order to develop learning relationships in classrooms and collegiality among teachers as professionals.

In LSLC, there is an emphasis on changing teaching styles from a conventional approach to collaborative learning based on mediation by both tools and humans (Kozulin, 2003). The impact of pedagogical reform has been reported in the leading schools of LSLC. One of the best examples is Gakuyo Junior High School (Sato and Sato, 2003). Gakuyo was a troubled school in which few students participated in learning and the teachers were almost burnt out. Its academic status was one of the worst in the city — it ranked 11th out of 14 schools. However, after the introduction of reformed pedagogy, students began participating actively in learning within half a year; within two years, the school's academic ranking rose to third.

The LSLC approach has attracted the attention of Japanese educators and is quietly but steadily becoming popular among them. In 1998, the LSLC programme started with three pilot schools. There are now at least 300 primary schools, 100 junior high schools, and 50 high schools engaged in LSLC, although there are no exact statistics. LSLC has particularly been utilised in reforming troubled and difficult schools.

Conclusion

This paper aims to discuss teacher education in Japan, covering pre-service education at the university level, PSTE, and in-service training. In regards to pre-service education, after a series of reports and recommendations provided by various bodies, the curriculum has shifted more to an approach that emphasises reflective practices. PSTE is supposed to be practical, but it is still very unclear what the nature of such institutions is. Japanese society is rapidly changing, and many difficult challenges are emerging. However, TLRS does not seem to be a solution to these challenges, and we find it extremely difficult to find room for improving or utilising TLRS because of its costs and the political intentions behind its introduction. Rather, it is necessary for teachers to be united and involved in reforming themselves at every school level in order to create secure learning spaces and communities inside the schools.

From this analysis on the literature about the recent teacher education in Japan, it has become clear that the recent major institutional reforms in teacher

education and in-service training do not necessarily have a positive impact on teachers' professional development. Rather, an accumulation of steady efforts at the school level would be more beneficial, and it is very important that teachers have a positive environment for learning. It is remarkable that Japanese teachers have used lesson study to experience reflective practices in their working places without the help of university faculty members. However, it is also true that having teachers rely too much on themselves would confine their capacities, and there should be further collaboration between universities and schools in doing lesson study.

It has also become clear that pre-service training at the Bachelor's degree level and at school sites is reflective, but postgraduate education, particularly PSTE, still has much room to become more reflective. This is probably due to a lack of vision regarding its educational goals. Still, university faculty members and bureaucrats are unsure about how they would like to develop PSTE. However, this is an urgent and crucial matter to cover because teachers need to grow in lifelong terms, which requires postgraduate education. Teachers in the middle of their careers will definitely need to study to increase their academic and practical capacities, and postgraduate education is needed for that purpose.

We suggest three issues for future research: first, there is a need to explore what kinds of collaboration would be preferable between schools and universities. There is much in this field that needs to be discussed further as many research outcomes have been reported recently regarding collaboration between faculty members and teachers. However, there have been fewer discussions about how they should work together.

Second, in order to form a mission and vision for PSTE, various practices should be tested through trial and error. As many of these cases should be reported as possible because these reports would help university faculty members and bureaucrats understand how to improve PSTE and their institutions. Such reports are classified as self-studies of teacher education practices (Loughran, 2004), so they may also help faculty members pay more attention to their own institutions from an academic perspective.

Third, LSLC practices need to be reported more. Sato and his colleagues have rigorously reported on the progress made in the LSLC schools, but the number of reports is still very limited. A larger number of reports would bring more attention to this practice from abroad, so it is also important that the reports be written in English.

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