



Human Orientation: The Demand of In-Service Teacher Education

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Abstract

In-service teacher education is an important approach of teacher professional development, teachers are the most dynamic and subjective elements of in-service teacher education among all. Therefore, human orientation being the demand for in-service teacher education, which is mainly embodied with “human-oriented” value orientation, teacher as a reflective role, and the trend of in-service teacher education development.

Key words: In-service teacher education; Human orientation; Demand

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INTRODUCTION

In-service teacher education is an important approach of teacher professional development. The object of in-service teacher education is human, while human has a dual nature, which is “human exist as individuals subjectively, while they exist in the natural inorganic conditions objectively” (*Complete Works of Marx & Engles [Vol. 46 (I)]*, 1979, p.491). Thus in in-service teacher education can achieve the goals only if we pay high attention to the subjective initiative of teachers, and fully demonstrate their subjectivity. The essence of in-service teacher education is the purposeful, planned and organized teacher training programs that contribute to in-service

teachers’ self-construction of subjectivities. It is not only teachers’ subjective reflection on their own experience and environment, but also the process of reprocessing and recreation of the experience and environment, and the teachers’ self-development. Therefore, the demand for in-service teacher education should be embodied with “human-oriented” value orientation, teacher as a reflective role, and the trend of in-service teacher education development.

1. “HUMAN-ORIENTED” VALUE ORIENTATION

1.1 A Catalyst for the Subject Construction of “Human”

The construction of in-service teacher education is an activity on the basis of teachers’ subjective initiative, to explore, reflect and construct their own knowledge and experience to improve their practice ability in teaching. It is a process of teachers’ cognitive development and the accumulation of practical knowledge. Thus, we should learn the theories of teacher education and teacher learning in the perspective of cognitive mechanism.

The founder of cognitive constructionism theory Piaget explained: “knowledge does not result from a mere recording of observations without a structuring activity on the part of the subject. Nor do any a priori or innate cognitive structures exist in man; the functioning of intelligence alone is hereditary and creates structures only through an organization of successive actions performed on objects. Consequently, an epistemology conforming to the data of psychogenesis could be neither empiricist nor preformationist, but could consist only of a constructivism” (Phillips, 1995). Therefore, when teachers facing new cognitions, the cognitive structure they already owned will be activated and react with the new cognitions mainly in the following three aspects: a) The old and new

cognitions are linked with each other, the already owned cognitive structure of the teachers will be expanded and developed; b) The old and new cognitions conflict with each other, their already owned cognitive structure will be upgraded, and subjective cognitive structure will be restructured and developed; c) The teachers omit any link and conflict, the new cognition will be assimilated by their already owned cognition. The first and second changes contribute to the improvement of the teachers, however, most teachers usually tend to depend on already owned cognitions, rather than to question, and their negligence of the links and conflict between old and new cognitions will result in a failure in the reconstruction of cognitions. In other words, in-service teacher education can only achieve its goal on the basis of “teacher orientation”, teachers’ initiative of participation and self-construction.

1.2 Encourage the Interactions Among “Individuals”

Considering the process of teacher learning, cognitive constructionism is more likely to understand the development of cognition from the perspective of individuals, however, this single perspective usually results in the negligence of sociality in the development of cognition. As a matter of fact, teachers as “individuals” in social community, their meaning construction is indeed completed through the reflection of dialogues, experience and environment in the social community. Lev Vygotsky, one of the figures of social constructivism, stated that intelligence structures of human and their thinking process come from social interactions with others, which not only influence the development of cognition, but also contribute to the development of cognitive structure and thinking process. The social origin of cognitive activities explains that higher mental process is constructed in the human interactions, and be internalized as a part of their cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2005, pp.48-49). Therefore, the development of teachers’ subjective cognition in teacher education is not only the construction of their own cognitive structure, but also the instruction of meaning negotiation on the basis of interactions between teachers and social environment. During teacher education, the teachers not only communicate with text, but also the reflective interactions with themselves, other individuals, environment and other social elements are also happening. In other words, in-service teacher education is premised the starting point of the already owned cognitive structure, focuses on the encouraging the interactions among teachers, environment and social community in order to achieve the cognitive development and upgrade, and accomplish self-actualization and the professional development. Thus, in-service teacher education must be human-oriented, the development can be achieved only if we put high premium on teachers as individuals of the social construction process and their interaction with other individuals and the society.

1.3 The “Human-Oriented” Meaning World

As advanced animals, humans do not simply bend to the material desire like other animals. The most essential difference between human’s life activity and other animals’ is:

The animal and its life activity are identical. An animal does not differentiate itself from its life activity, the animal itself is the life activity. While humans make life activity the object and will of their consciousness. Human’s life activity is conscious, it distinguishes humans from their life activity (Marx, 2000, p.57)

Humans create the world of meaning to produce and nurture lives. “Human does not exist purely; the existence of human always involves meanings” (Heschel, 2007, p.35). However, the world of meaning indicates the necessity of human rather than the possibility. Hence, there is no chance for human not to pursue the meaningful and valuable necessity. Adler argued that humans started to search and construct their own world of meaning after they were born: “we have searched and explored the meaning of life since the day of birth.” (Adler, 2006, p.15) Thus, “human orientation” is necessary for humans to seek the world of meaning, which means teacher education is the demand and necessity for the construction of teachers’ world of meaning.

2. THE REFLECTIVE ROLE OF TEACHERS

The logical starting point of teacher education determines what roles the teachers are, teacher education respond to the demand for specific role of teachers. Throughout the development of teacher education, the role of teachers is always influences by the cognition and the view of knowledge, it changes from technical rationality to practical rationality, from authoritative view of knowledge to individual view of knowledge. Teacher education is now facing the transition of paradigm, the cognitive logic of teacher education research is turning to practical rationality from technical rationality, and the theoretical basis is shifting from theory to practice. The role of teachers is now transitioning from passive practitioner to reflective practitioner.

2.1 “Authoritative View of Knowledge” and “Passive Practitioner”

Technical rationalism is originated from the admiration of science and rationality, it is the positivist practical epistemology which is premised on the theoretical basis of behavioral psychology. Under the cognitive logic of “technical rationality”, knowledge and practice is divided in binary, knowledge is considered as the abstract description of formalized, categorized concepts, definition and rules, this symbolized statement characterized by objectivity. This theoretical knowledge can guide practice, and solve problems with the theoretical knowledge of

the process of practice. Hence, teaching is regarded as a universal technique, can be learned from the simulation of experienced teachers. Teachers as technicians are “passive practitioner”, their work is simplified and fixed, and the teaching tasks can be done by following the certain procedures. This view of teachers’ role is premised on the following three assumptions: a) Education theory is characterized by scientificity and universality. The purpose of teacher education is teaching this scientific and universal knowledge and techniques to the learners, which can be applied in their own teaching career; b) Education theory is superior to teaching practice, education theorists are the producer and authoritative interpreter of education theories, while the learners (e.g. primary or middle school teachers) become the customers of these theories; c) Teacher practice is the application of education theories, and the process of problem solving by using theoretical knowledge.

Under the background of “Technical rationality”, the malpractice of teacher education is people will not practice until they learned the principles and theories, they only recognize that practice is guided by theories, while neglect the truth that theories’ reliance on practice. Therefore theory and practice are divided artificially. Under the logic of “technical rationality”, teaching practice is misunderstood as a process of application, the role of teachers is treated as the “passive practitioner” gradually, that is teachers are the practitioner of the courses, textbooks, and teaching tasks designed by the education theorist. Thus, the misunderstanding and devaluation of teachers’ professional subjectivity result in parroting textbooks and completing teaching tasks by rote, teachers are more discouraging for the reflection of the meaning of teaching and the purpose of the courses.

2.2 “Individualistic Knowledge” and “Reflective Practitioner”

Reflective practicing epistemology is founded on the theories of cognitive constructivism psychology, the key concept is reflection, which emphasizes the construction of knowledge system through teachers’ self-reflection. Early in the 1930s, John Dewey considered reflection as a certain form of thinking, which he defined as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusion to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p.9). Under the cognition approach of criticizing the technical rationality and the basis of teachers’ educational view and roles, Schön distinguished two types of professional practice. The first type is practice of “high hard ground”, the situation and the purpose are clear, the practitioner only needs to solve problems with scientific theories and techniques without re-defining the problems. The second type is professional practice of “swampy lowlands”, characterized by difficulties, fuzziness, uncertainty, uniqueness and value conflict,

which are the “determinate zones” of practice. Scientific knowledge and techniques do not solve problems unless “knowing-in-action” (Schön, 1983, p.39, 141, 131-132.). Schön defines “knowing-in-action” as the practical knowledge that professionals hold through reflection, it is the knowledge of the reflection through problem solving in the difficult, uncertain, fuzzy, value-conflicted situation. This knowledge is an intuitive process of instant action, it is driven and tested “on-the-spot experiment” (Ibid.). Max Van Manen calls it “the tact of teaching”. In other words, Schön regards teaching practice a “swampy lowlands” type of professional practice, it requires reflection-in-action to confirm and solve problems. The reflection is the interaction of practitioners and problems of certain situation. Therefore, teachers should be the reflective practitioner in teaching practice, the function of in-service teacher education should be improving teachers’ ability of reflection in action.

Only in-service teacher education under the approach of reflective practical epistemology shows the value of “human orientation”, reflective teachers can

find out and solve the problems in classroom practice, question their personal assumptions and value of teaching, link the institutional and cultural situation in teaching, get involved in curriculum development, and responsible for personal professional development. (Schön, 1987, p.22)

In other words, the characteristics of reflective teachers include: a) Subjectivity. A reflective practitioner is the problem solver with subjectivity, which implies the human dimension of education quality. Reflective practice is the practice with purpose, the practitioners undergo reflective interactions with the environment constantly and adjust their behaviors in the process. The subjectivity of the practitioner runs throughout this process. b) Exploratory. Practitioners are reflective explorers in the real situation, which implies the dimension of teachers’ intellectual constitution. Reflective practitioners are the producer of knowledge, they reflect throughout the process of practice: to find and identify the problem, try to solve it, evaluate the situation, adjust their behaviors, and re-reflect to improve the practice. Teachers’ practical knowledge is formed and developed in this process of reflective teaching practice. c) The creativity of reflective practitioner. Firstly, practice is the process of the creating and developing of practical knowledge of reflective practitioners; secondly, practice is the process of course developing of reflective practitioners, these courses are not pre-existed but created. Lastly, practice is the process of criticizing the current situation and improving the practice creatively. d) The typical intellectual feature of reflective practitioners is “practical knowledge”. The researchers all considered teaching practice a process of reflective practice, reflective teachers are characterized by individual, silent, unique “practical knowledge”. Teachers are no longer the passive receiver, instructor, customer of knowledge, but

proactive creator, practitioner and evaluator in teacher education. They are more likely to be the creators of learning environment, the promoters of learning, and critical thinkers.

Under the perspective of practical intelligence, professional practice's characteristics of situational, implicit, individual, and practical highlighted in the process of education and even teacher education, teachers are improved in professional practice as individuals. Thus, the role of teachers is changed from "passive performer" to "active reflector" gradually in the process of practice.

3. THE INEVITABLE TREND OF "HUMAN ORIENTATION"

Under the influence of humanist psychology, the humanist trend of thought prevailed during 1960s and 1970s, whose core idea is "human orientation". Humanist trend think highly of the value of human, emphasizes on subject initiatives of educatee, pursues self-actualization and the development of personal potential. And the development of teacher profession coincides with this thought. In order to promote the professional development of teachers, all the world put a high premium on how the personal subjectivity is performed in teacher education. Throughout the teacher professionalization in the U.S., in-service teacher education experienced a development of emphasis from academic knowledge, teaching skills, to the personal development of teachers, the emphasis changed from external evaluation to the real demand of teachers themselves, which indicates the human oriented tendency. The goal of America's in-service teacher education has changed from training "scholarly" teachers and focusing on their academic ability, to training "skillful" teachers and "clinical experts", then to "developmental" teachers and focusing the improving of their overall qualities and their personal professional development. To reform in-service teacher education, on the one hand the U.S. studied the professional standards of teachers, and on the other they supported teachers' professional development, introduced professional development schools (PDS), the starting point for a PDS is the real classroom issues, exploring the solutions to the problems as the teaching method, and based on real classroom situations. For the implementation of teacher education, people focus on improving the subjective construction of teachers through real situation interactions, such as professional training groups and seminars that combines different learning methods developed by French teacher education institutes; concentration lectures, scholarly seminars, workshops, and peer guidance developed by British teacher education institutes. And what is more, problem-based learning is applied in the training of primary school teachers in child development courses. For example, they make up the situations of a series of problems a little girl Laura may

face from the age of 4 to 9, group the teacher education majors in five to play Laura's parents and friends, and let them solve the problems together using the theoretical knowledge of child development (Zhang & Zhong, 2012, p.10). The concept of "teacher education" was first formally raised in May of 2001, in the "Decision of the State Council on the Reform and Development of Basic education". Teacher education has developed from continuing education to teacher education, from degree compensatory in-service teacher education to systematic in-service teacher education, it has evolved gradually from monotonousness to multi-dimension, from disorder to order, and from non-existence of human to human orientation.

CONCLUSION

The human-oriented demand for in-service teacher education emphasizes on the teachers' personal development. The value orientation of in-service teacher education should be premised on promoting individual's subjective construction, and the construction of world of meaning through social interactions. The role of teachers should be based on the approach of reflective practice, turn the teachers from "technicians" to "reflective practitioner". Meanwhile, human orientation is a worldwide inevitable tendency of the reform of teacher education.

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