

# A Study on the Curriculum of Pre-service Teacher Education ----from the View of Teachers' Professional Development

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**ABSTRACT:** Teachers' professional development is not only the trend of international teacher education reform, but also the focus of teacher education in China. Pre-service teacher education is the starting point of teacher professional development, the formation and further development of teacher's professional ability relies on the scientific pre-service teacher education curriculum. At present, there are many shortcomings in pre-service teacher education curriculum in our country. In this paper, the specific requirements based on the theoretical perspective of teacher professional development are put forward, and then a scientific curriculum of pre-service teacher education is constructed which can promote teacher professional development.

**KEYWORD:** Teachers' professional development, Pre-service teacher education, Curriculum construction

## 1 INTRODUCTION

National education reform and development of long-term planning programs pointed out that "Education is the most important foundation in a hundred year development strategy of a nation; while the implementation of education policies based on teachers". Education is the hope of national prosperity, and the revitalization of education relies on teachers. Teachers bear the historical responsibility of fostering talents to the nation; the teacher's quality and teaching level directly affect the improvement of citizens' attainment and the quality of talents they trained.

The notion of "teachers' professional development" was first stated in 1960s that has set a new standard for the reform of teacher education. Pre-service teacher preparation, as the starting point of teacher education, plays a vital role in the process of teachers' professional development, while the courses offered in this period are crucial for improving talents quality. Therefore, this paper will lay the emphasis on the curriculum of pre-service teacher preparation and try to build a more rational curriculum structure on the basis of teachers' professional development.

## 2 TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teacher professionalization is a process of professional development which aims at the

improvement of teaching quality and the path to become a professional teacher, it refers to the teacher to acquire education specialized knowledge and norms, form the teaching ability, obtain qualification and implement professional autonomy and ethics in the procedure of his career by relying on lifelong professional training and professional organizations. In other words, teacher professionalization means the one that developed from an ordinary citizen into an educator.

Teachers' professional development is the process of accepting new knowledge constantly and promoting professional ability gradually. An expert teacher calls for continuous learning and exploring. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) pointed out in 1966 that teaching should be taken as a specialized occupation which requires specialized knowledge and specific technology obtained through strictly and continuously learning, from this we can see, UNESCO not only emphasis the professionalism of teachers, but also put forward new requirements for improving the quality of teachers. A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century and Tomorrow's Teachers which were delivered by Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and The Holmes Group respectively in 1986 aroused great attention, both reports highlighted the importance of professionalism of teachers. Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China was implemented on January 1, 1994, the law legally confirmed the professionalism and irreplaceability of teacher. And the teachers' qualification certificate

system implemented in 1995 further enhanced teachers' specialization.

The professional growth of a teacher candidate could be roughly divided into four periods: pre-service preparation, novice teacher, qualified teacher and expert teacher. As we all know, pre-service teacher preparation is the starting point as well as the main part of teachers' professional development, it lays a solid foundation for the life-long development of teacher candidates. The quality of pre-service preparation has direct and profound influence on the long-term development. Before step into teaching career, the candidates need to spend a certain amount of time in university or normal college to receive systematic and professional education. They obtain the theoretical and practical knowledge through a series of courses, for this reason, curriculum must be well preplanned. But we can feel anything but optimistic about the current situation of China's pre-service teacher education curriculum, and this will be discussed in detail in the following section.

### 3 THE STATUS QUO OF CHINA'S PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The current teacher education system in China carried on the former Soviet Union's pattern and reformed on the basis of it. The irrational course proportion, out-of-date course content and other unreasonable course settings hampered the professional development of teacher candidates. For a long time, part of teacher education courses in our country were named by "...gy", such as pedagogy, pedagogical psychology, education sociology etc. Pedagogy, psychology and subject-matter didactics composed teachers' professional knowledge. After completing these courses, teacher candidates remembered a lot of concepts passively instead of thinking independently, they got to know much about theories but lack the ability to solve problems, what's more, some of the course contents are interrelated or overlapped, finishing them all is definitely a waste of time.

At present, pre-service teacher education curriculum in our country includes three aspects, they are: liberal studies courses, major courses and education courses.

Liberal studies courses aim at broadening students' horizon, improving their self-cultivation and developing their overall capability. Developed countries generally took this kind of courses seriously, for example, in America the proportion of liberal studies courses accounted for 40% in the teacher preparation curriculum, Germany, 33.3%, Japan, 37.7%, while in our country, the percentage is 21%. We not only lag behind in the proportion of

this kind of courses, but also lack variety in the electives.

Major courses equipped teacher candidates with subject-matter knowledge and can be further divided into specialized basic courses, compulsory major courses and elective major courses. This kind of courses accounted for the largest proportion in our teacher education curriculum. The point is, only by mastering the subject-matter knowledge could not guarantee the ability of knowing how to teach, and that's the reason why we need education courses.

Education courses provide systematical and professional knowledge on how to teach effectively. Meanwhile, education courses have significant value on cultivating teacher candidates' career identity, practicing their teaching skills and inspiring their consciousness towards professional development.

In general, pre-service teacher preparation curriculum in our country attached much more importance to the academic knowledge which is unsuitable for the demands of labor market. We should find a way to balance the proportion of the three kinds of courses, update the course content in order to cultivate more professional and pragmatic teaching talents. Here below are some requirements for the curriculum from the view of teachers' professional development.

### 4 REQUIREMENTS FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM FROM THE VIEW OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers' professional development embeds three ideas which can be taken as the requirements for the design of the curriculum.

First, the top priority of teacher should be cultivating talents. Teachers, as the promoter of science, knowledge and culture, carrying the hope of human progress, this is also the distinguish features of teachers' profession compared with other occupations. In this opinion, the curriculum should aim at enriching prospective teachers' general and specialized knowledge, improving their professional teaching skills, and cultivating their comprehensive educating ability ultimately. In our country, the principle of the reform of basic education curriculum is "concerning the development of each student", and under the guidance of this principle, the basic education emphasizes mutual respect, caring and children-oriented philosophy in the courses. Correspondingly, such principle should also reflect in the curriculum of pre-service teacher education. Therefore, help the prospective teacher set up a correct view on children is the fundamental content of pre-service teacher education curriculum.

Second, determined by the specific characteristic of teacher occupation, the cultivation of teachers

should be practice-oriented. That is to say, the curriculum should value teaching practice a lot. The activity of teaching engages not only knowledge transmission but also skills application. Teaching is a problem solving process under the complicated circumstances. Teaching situation is dynamic and diversified, and there is not a theory or a skill that universally suits all, so that teachers should form their own teaching wit. The wisdom of education comes from practicing experience that accumulated in long-term interactive teaching. It is not abstract but the direct experience of the teachers. So pre-service teacher courses should enhance the concept of practical ideal, and pay more attention to the cultivation of real-problem-solving ability. The courses should also be arranged in accordance with the requirements proposed by basic education. Expert teacher's ability to control the class is the result of the accumulation of education teaching practice, and the research, experience and reflection on the education teaching. It takes a lot to sublimate practical experience into education theory. Therefore, Teacher professionalization not only takes time and efforts but also requires the process of reflection and the atmosphere for growth. An outstanding teacher must has his/her own teaching style and education wit, he/she can solve the problem whatever comes into being, while cultivating our teacher candidates into this type of teacher is the ultimate goal of our pre-service teacher education curriculum.

Third, teachers' professional development calls for life-long learning. Teachers need to learn continuously, and update their knowledge constantly. Teachers' professional development comes along with the whole process of their vocation development. Only by the professional practice can teachers acquire maturity in their career. The concept of life-long learning is another principle that we should implant to the teacher candidates through the implementation of the courses. With the development of our society, a person can never be a know-it-all, so everyone should never stop learning. Bearing in mind the ancient Chinese proverb of "teaching one to fish is better than giving him fish", in the pre-service teacher education, we should not only teach the candidates theoretical knowledge but also teach them the knowledge of "how to teach", and provide them with field experience and teaching practice as much as possible, so that they could form their own teaching style. The last but not least, we should create an atmosphere in which everybody dare to doubt the existent theories, they can raise questions which they want to figure out, and their critical thinking is always highly appreciated, all of the endeavor will surely help them go further in the way of life-long learning and lead them to a better future.

## 5 CONSTRUCTING WELL-ORGANIZED PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Teachers' professional development can be divided into three phases: pre-service preparation, induction training and on-the-job training. Pre-service teacher education is the starting point and also of great importance. Well-organized pre-service teacher education curriculum is the direct factor which affecting the quality of teacher cultivation, the foundation for preparing qualified teachers and the safeguard for teacher professionalization. What follows are about to discuss the requirements for pre-service teacher education curriculum based on the theory of teachers' professional development and try to construct a well-organized pre-service teacher education curriculum.

### 5.1 *Professional knowledge—reasonable course content and rational course proportion*

Professional knowledge courses include liberal studies courses and education courses. Taking our national conditions into consideration, we can do little to change the status quo of the setting of liberal studies courses, what we can do is to increase the scale and descriptions of electives, provide students with more options to broaden their horizon. According to Australian Education Council of Deans in 1998, teachers need "pedagogical knowledge" which can integrate professional knowledge with other specialized content and ability.

Well-organized pre-service teacher education curriculum should be designed for the sake of promoting comprehensive and coordinated development of teacher candidates' professional ability. It should also seek balance between the proportion of liberal studies courses and education courses.

### 5.2 *Professional skills—cultivating teacher candidates' teaching ability through systematic curriculum*

Professional skills courses include field experience and education practice. Teacher candidates need to apply theoretical knowledge into practice and improve their teaching ability during the process of practicing. Previous teaching practice lasts for a short time which leads to the insufficiency in teacher candidates' teaching ability. Besides, it is hard for teacher candidates to involve in the real teaching circumstances which will certainly have a negative influence on the internship effectiveness.

Therefore, in addition to guarantee the time and efficiency of education practice, we should provide them with more opportunities to get to know the

children and current situation of primary and middle schools.

### 5.3 *Professional attitudes—establishing professional ideal, advocating life-long learning*

Professional attitudes courses include mental health courses and professional ethics courses. Teachers' mental health is of great importance in their teaching professions. On one hand, teacher candidates should accept their own mental health education, and on the other hand, they also need to learn how to teach psychological health lessons to their students. Pre-service teacher education institutions can set related curriculum to develop a positive life attitude of teacher candidates and enable them to carry on mental health counseling.

All in all, pre-service teacher education curriculum should abide by the theory of teachers' professional development, construct the course system from the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes viewpoints, these three aspects support and coordinate with each other and all of them together

will promote the professional development of pre-service teachers.

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