

Past and Future of Teacher Education in JAPAN: Considering the Modality of Practical Experiences in COVID-19 Pandemics

Masashi Asakura
University of Tsukuba

Abstract

Teacher education in Japan has emphasized the importance of “practice” for a number of years. This has been embodied in the teaching practicum and in-service training in particular lesson studies in the schools. However, COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to secure practical training opportunities that require face-to-face communication.

In the early days of the pandemic, a major issue for many teacher training institutions including university, college and junior college was how to secure opportunities for educational practicum training. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has taken measures to set the duration of teaching practicum flexibly, but it is still unclear how the shortened duration will change the outcome of teaching practice. Currently, Japan is facing the sixth wave of the pandemic, and it is difficult to plan the duration of practical training because it is largely dependent on the spread of infectious diseases. In recent years, there have been many attempts by not only universities but also local boards of education to provide practical experience as practicum training to students who want to become teachers, but these efforts will come to a halt under the pandemic.

Teachers in Japan have regularly conducted lesson study with colleagues in their schools and with teachers from other schools. The training opportunities for teachers that have been regularly provided have also been reduced. For example, the activities of research groups that exchanged information on subject teaching methods and discussed classroom teaching methods have stagnated.

In Japan, the pandemic has forced us to rethink the essential meaning of teaching practicum and in-service training. At the same time, the Corona disaster revealed the stagnation in the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) devices in Japanese school education. This became a hot topic in Japan through international comparisons, and was recognized as a major issue in ensuring children’s learning during the simultaneous closure of schools. In response to this, Japan has decided to make subjects related to the use of ICT a compulsory part of the teacher training course. However, simply promoting the use of ICT equipment by teachers without examining why Japan lags behind other countries in the use of ICT and what the challenges are in introducing new tools into school education will not be enough to achieve learning outcomes for children.

I would like to discuss how to develop the new skills required of teachers to use technology, while taking over the existing teacher training and in-service teacher training.