

Doctoral Dissertation Abstract

Title of Doctoral Dissertation: Establishment of a new educational method to train beginning elementary school teachers by focusing on opportunities for their self-growth and development - Focusing on the formative intervention of supervising teachers through collaborative learning -

Name: GOTO IKUKO

This study aims to establish a new educational method to train beginning elementary school teachers by focusing on opportunities for their self-growth and development using Engeström's expansive learning theory, which emphasizes breaking away from existing constraints full of contradictions and irrationality. That is, this study seeks to transform the system for how beginning teachers learn through conventional lectures and programs into collaborative learning where beginning teachers self-analyze what they implement to find solutions or directions that facilitate their own self-development.

This study grew out of concern for four problems in the training and education of beginning teachers. The first problem is a deterioration in the capacity to educate a sufficient number of beginning teachers to replace the massive number of retiring baby boomer teachers. The second is the disappearance of collegiality from school and work, which makes beginning teachers less likely to gain support from their colleagues. The third is, although the beginning teacher training system should play a pivotal role in the teacher development process, the reality is a poorly-functioning system. The fourth is changes at school as indicated above, which prevent beginning teachers from becoming close to their mentor or cohort teachers and result in the isolation of beginning teachers. The fourth problem relates to how university students aspiring to become teachers should be nurtured.

In this study, we conducted our own questionnaire survey of beginning teachers. We investigated factors to help beginning teachers overcome immediate problems as well as factors that prevent them from doing so. By providing direct assistance to beginning teachers and keeping records of their growth, we discovered catalysts and reasons for their improvement. Next, we studied cohort-focused learning. By designing and mediating collaborative learning activities which center on dialogue with colleagues, we explored how to promote beginning teachers' growth. Then we moved on to investigate what roles and meaning supervisory teachers have in designing and mediating collaborative learning for beginning teacher training. Last, we examined approaches to internships that both serve a useful purpose for beginning teachers and initiate their self-sustaining growth.

In the study of collaborative learning, we referred to intermediate conceptual tools in expansive learning. We focused on tools such as concepts, models and visions which beginning teachers developed to overcome their teaching problems. In the study of intervention by supervising teachers, we referred to Engeström's formative intervention. We paid attention to the beginning teachers' subjective learning opportunities created by supervising teachers.

Research results were discussed from four perspectives: (1) Catalysts for beginning teachers' self-growth and development (2) Factors that prevent their self-growth and development (3) Collaborative learning that facilitates their self-growth and development, and formative intervention of supervising teachers, and (4) Internships that serve a useful purpose for beginning teachers to initiate their own self-sustaining growth. The first perspective examines how beginning teachers created intermediate conceptual tools out of their own needs and through their subjective learning. We found that their tools were effective in helping them independently resolve their problems. Also, the learning cycles that drove their self-growth and development were created by interventionists who interactively engaged with the beginning teachers. The second perspective is factors and problems which prevented beginning teachers' self-development. That is, one possibility is that the current mentor system isolates beginning teachers from their larger organization. In addition, the ability to understand a group of students, which beginning teachers have a difficult time acquiring, is closely related to class management ability, and therefore classroom management should be nurtured from the beginning when students are undergraduates. The focal point of the third perspective was collaborative learning that was designed for beginning teacher self-learning. Dialogue with other teachers visualized the conflicts and challenges they faced, which helped beginning teachers find tips and tools to solve their problems. We clarified that collaborative learning leads to develop middle-level leaders as well. Formative interventions of management-level teachers such as providing career counseling were proven useful to enrich collaborative learning. The fourth perspective examined approaches to internships that would serve a useful purpose for beginning teachers in which they could initiate their own self-sustaining growth. From the results, we concluded that beginning teachers are more likely to acquire the ability to understand a group of students and the ability to provide appropriate instruction by transforming the internship during the self-growth and development period into a place to gain hands-on experience as the main teacher.

Creation of opportunities for beginning teachers' self-growth and development depends on how much they can be subjective in their learning. The same holds true for nurturing university students aspiring to become teachers. Indeed, self-growth and development opportunities lie in implementation with trial and error and exploratory learning as the main instructor.

This study pointed out the need for nurturing beginning teachers from a new perspective of teacher development. To attain this need, fundamental reform of the beginning teacher development system including the internship period is indispensable. At the same time, what we call a third learning place should be created in which researchers and practitioners can learn from each other in a collaborative manner. Such a comprehensive approach to teacher development should improve educational ability at school and thus contribute to the enhancement of academic performance of children in the next generation.