The Application of Facilitation in Humanist Teacher Education: Consideration of A Practical Method of Teacher Education

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0. Introduction

Humanist teacher education attach great importance to the subjectivity of teachers in professional development. In the face of complicated educational ecology and school reform, the most effective forms of teachers’ professional development are those emphasize ‘learning in and from practice’ (Ball & Cohen, 1999). However, teachers are not born excellent reflectionist, lacking of professional facilitators to support faculty’s reflection, the reflective content and reflection degree varies greatly between individual faculty members. Proper facilitation can enable teachers to share, reflect and refine their own educational experience, to achieve the combination of self-realization and professional development (Schön, 1983; Van Manen, 2016). While teacher educators external to the school sometimes provide facilitation for teacher peer groups, increasingly, Teachers themselves are serving as facilitators for groups as a way of professional development (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

The study reported in this paper occurs during a time of just such a reform of faculty development in China university level. Faculty development refers to the positive changes in professional cognition, attitude, skills, cultivation and behavior of university teachers through theoretical learning and practice in various ways centering on the needs of career development (Gaff, 1975; Centra, 1976; Eble & McKeachie, 1985). Faculty development at university level is quite different from that of secondary schools. At the beginning of the faculty development in China, it was a reform driven by national policies from top to bottom, but the ultimate goal is to realize the conscious action of university teachers’ development. University teachers need more subjectivity in their professional development. This paper is based on a faculty development program: Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) series, aims to explore what kind of facilitation can promote university teacher’s subjectivity and self-reflection.

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1. Background

1.1 Humanist teacher education

Humanism starts from the western ideological tradition of ancient Greece in the fifth century BC (Ye, 2015). The core of humanism is human, taking human beings as the basis of judging and analyzing the world as well as the perspective of solving problems. Humanism has three characteristics (Bullock, 1985): First of all, humanism focuses on people, everything starts from human experience, and all knowledge of people comes from their own experience; Second, humanism focuses on the specific individual, emphasizing that each person has his or her own unique value, unlimited development potential and creativity, which should be respected. Again, humanism values the power of rational thinking. Traditional model of teacher development has been skill-based, focusing on the transmission of information to teachers (Bausmith & Barry, 2011), training teachers to be skilled workers with a good set of teaching skills rather than professionals with a deeper and broader professional vision. The core of teacher education of humanism orientation is to emphasize teachers' subjectivity in teaching and self-development, and to take qualitative research as the main research method (Zhang & Ye, 2014). So how to facilitate teacher’s subjectivity and realize the richness of teachers and students creatively through teaching is quite important. Facilitation is a method in faculty development which make teachers give full play to their subjectivity easier.

1.2 The Chinese context

With the popularization of higher education, the public and society begin to supervise the management of higher education, and the quality of higher education become a concern (Pan, 2000; Yang, 2001). A well faculty development system is an inevitable requirement to guarantee the quality of teachers and improve the quality of higher education. On July 1, 2011, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance issued the implementation opinions of the "Undergraduate Teaching Project", officially launching the "Project of Undergraduate Teaching Quality and Teaching Reform Project of Higher Institutions". The project aims to focus on the key areas, weak links and urgent problems that affect and restrict the quality of undergraduate education. As a result, improving teachers' teaching ability, strengthening and innovating teacher training became one of the core tasks.
In December 2012, thirty national faculty development demonstration centers were established. Those centers were built in order to improve faculty’s professional development, especially on teaching skills, and promote the reform of teacher training, consulting, teaching and quality evaluation work. After that, provinces have promulgated policies to build faculty or teaching development institutions in provincial colleges and universities. From then, faculty development became an important task in colleges and universities. Again, in January 2018, the Party central committee and the state council attach great importance to the teacher education, and issued "on deepening the reform of the new age teachers team construction comprehensive opinion", On January 20, 2018. The Opinion pointed out that the development of teachers in colleges and universities should build platforms, organize training activities, strengthen the study and guidance of teaching, to promote the teaching reform and innovation, promoting teachers' teaching skills upgrading training, let the scientists become educators.

According to the practice of promoting the professional development of teachers in colleges and universities in China, there are mainly three modes (Shi & Ye, 2017): expert teaching, experience sharing and Listening to classes and give evaluative feedbacks. Firstly, the expert teaching mode mainly invites researchers of educational theory to teach the theory of education and teaching methods or strategies. This mode has the technical rational tendency on epistemology, that knowledge has the characteristics of universality, certainty, objectivity, and standardization, attaches great importance to the education theories and one-way transmitting theoretical knowledge. Its advantage is to help teachers to establish a complete education theory framework, but its disadvantage is ignoring teaching as a situational, complexity, uncertainty work, and forgetting teaching practice is a creative practice and the importance of teacher reflection. The second, the experience sharing mode is mainly based on the discussion and sharing of senior teachers’ teaching experiences, and those discussion is usually based on the real teaching practice. Though the intuitive and specific experience sharing is very easy to arouse the resonance of teachers, most of these experiences are at the individual level. Due to the high disciplinary barriers in universities, in-depth reflection on teaching inevitably involves teaching content, which leads to the fact that although these experiences have a high use value in individual teachers, their exchange value is relatively low. Listening to classes and give evaluative feedbacks means that college teachers improve their teaching ability by listening to experts'
comments on their classes or observing excellent teachers' classes and listening to teaching experts' comments. Since the dialogue takes place on the educational scene, teachers can directly gain experience in solving practical problems. However, this mode also has three disadvantages. First, this mode lacks clear training objectives, and the content of experts' comments is entirely determined by the performance of the speaker, which may not completely cover all aspects of teaching. Although the audience can also learn something, it is the teacher who performed the class gains the most. Second, in this way, the power of discourse between experts and lecturers is not equal. The teacher who performed the class are still in a state of passive acceptance. When they do not believe the comments of experts, they may ignore the opinions of experts. Thirdly, it can't promote the sustainable development of teachers. If the lecturers are inexperienced or have limited self-reflection ability, especially the novice teachers lacking guidance and support in the subsequent teaching practice after listening to the evaluation activity, their teaching habits may still be unchanged. So, a new faculty development mode is need to cultivate university teachers’ subjectivity.

1.3 ISW series: a 3-level faculty teaching training program

This paper is taking Canadian Instructional Skills Workshop series (Instructional Skills Workshop, ISW) as an example, to explain in detail how to facilitate teacher subjectivity through effective facilitation. Originated in British Columbia, Canada, the Instructional skills workshop series (ISW) is a 24-hour, 3-day teaching skills enhancement workshop. The ISW program was introduced to Beijing Normal University in 2016 by the author, as a new program to develop faculty members. The workshop is based on microteaching training, and participants’ learning and discussion is under the leadership of the professional facilitator. Participants give three mini-courses over three days, and giving and receiving feedback from peers to promote self-reflection and teaching ability. The core of the workshop group is a series of mini cycle of teaching. Participants develop a deep understanding of participatory learning theory, design and give mini-lessons to the “learners”. The specific operation of the mini-teaching cycle in ISW is that each student has to complete three mini-lectures for the same group of students within three days, giving and receiving teaching feedback from the same group of students. Thus, everyone gives lessons, and also participates in other’s teaching, learning listening effectively, and at the same time improving their teaching reflection ability.
After more than 40 years of development, it becomes one of the core activities of teacher development programs in universities, colleges and educational institutions in Canada, the United States, Asia and other countries and regions. ISW series three different levels: Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW), Faculty Development Workshop (FDW) and Trainer Development Workshop (TDW). ISW is mainly for new teachers, teaching assistants, or experienced teachers to develop their basic teaching ability. For teachers who have participated in ISW, FDW develops their skills to lead and organize ISW in their own institutions, so that they can better serve as facilitators of ISW. TDW trains experienced ISW guides to lead FDW, and train trainers of ISW series workshops. Normally, participants are not eligible to participate in more advanced workshops until they have obtained a certificate of qualification from the previous level of workshop. This study focusses on the facilitator, and mainly explore the role and work of facilitator.

2. Methods

Because the focus of this study is facilitator’s understanding and method in practice, qualitative research methods were used. In the ISW, facilitators facilitate the three-day mini-lesson cycles and other theme seminars. In the mini-lesson cycle, one participant is the instructor and perform teaching, and other 4 participants are learners. Different from common teacher inquiry groups, this program was facilitated by peers instead of professional teacher educators. To ensure the effectiveness of peer facilitations, a higher-level workshop named Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW) was designed to train facilitators. In the FDW, participants need to lead facilitation three times, and when they pass the FDW, they can lead the instructional skills workshop. Usually, the FDW participants are selected by universities, who have rich teaching experiences or have excellent teaching.

Participants & Interview questions

The research participants are university teachers who have finished the facilitator development workshop (FDW) and lead the program was interviewed, to gather information for the following three questions:

1. What is the core of facilitation?
2. What are the goals when facilitating the teacher peer group?
3. What facilitators have done to reach those goals?

The interview was performed in both formal and informal ways. Saturated sampling was used to gather information. The interviews were analyzed to answer the three questions.

3. Findings

This session explores the responses to their understanding of facilitation and answers the three research questions.

3.1 The core of facilitation

The strongest theme emerging from the data analysis was the neutral role of facilitator. Facilitators are believed to use a participatory approach that allows teachers to spontaneously and voluntarily interact and discuss, exchange ideas, learn and reach consensus, and inspire enthusiasm and change. Successful facilitation needs facilitators' "no-self" status, and its core is to support teachers from a neutral position. After that, I explored why being neutral is important.

In the FDW, new facilitators are trained to be neutral when facilitating reflection and discussion parts, they give reasons why they need to be neutral. Most facilitators shared that it encourages teachers to care about learners. Support teachers from a neutral position helps the teacher to listen to learners.

“When they (teachers) cannot get advice from me, at first they are a little frustrated. They always want authorities, but I am not the authority, I am just as the same as they are. We are equal. What a teacher’s real care turn to students. Without the authority, they would like to listen to their students’ feedbacks.”

Support teachers from a neutral position also helps the teacher get support from their learners.

“A teacher though she was so nervous and gave a terrible lesson, but learners’ feedback surprised her. The learners actually didn’t make any comforting compliments but are discussing what they saw, and how they feel in the lesson.”

Another important reason why facilitators need to be neutral is because it encourages the phronesis of teachers. Just as one of the facilitators said, it returns the subjective consciousness of responsibility to the teacher.
“I used to tell the teachers what to do, but when they tried, if it doesn’t work well, the teacher will question me, think that is my problem.”

So, if the facilitator offer too much, the teacher cannot have responsibility for their own teaching. Besides, being neutral also means respects and empowers the teacher in action.

“Without my judging, they (teachers) open themselves, and would like to share more.”

“Being neutral means I trust the teachers. I believe they can solve problems.”

“Without the advices from the facilitator, the teacher need to figure out their own way to meet the learners’ need and to respond to learners’ challenge, which always surprise the whole group.”

3.2 The goals of facilitation

What facilitators referred to their goal of facilitation can be divided into three categories: empirical goal, ideological goal, and the pragmatic goal. Firstly, the empirical goal is concerned with insight into current educational reality, educational methods, techniques, and strategies that they can use to solve the problems.

“…You can see, from the mini-lesson, they (teachers) have limited teaching methods. They only ask students and get answers. Sometimes they just talking all the time. My goal is to let teachers to try more active teaching methods. My goal is to help them learn more interactive strategies, and bring back to their real classroom.”

However, some facilitators believed that the education ideological change is the most important. The ideological goal is concerned with insight into their educational values, such as understanding of both teaching and themselves as teachers. Just like one facilitator said:

“I do not think getting more teaching skills is the goal of facilitation. Teachers can learn more teaching skills from many other training activities. But, in ISW, they can learn more than that. ISW is a place to change a person, and let the teachers question their old educational beliefs. That is what a facilitator should do.”

Additionally, some facilitators have a deeper understanding of their mission, which can be called the pragmatic goal. The pragmatic goal is in concerned with changing, the combination of empirical domain knowledge and ideological domain knowledge, dealing with something based on practical considerations, and pointing straight to the future.
“ISW is an open system, a teacher can constantly find and solve the problems, and could learn from ‘trial and error’. After three exercises, they were able to form the habit of reflecting on their teaching. This is magic of ISW.”

3.3 How to perform facilitation?

Based on the above discussion, the effective facilitation are performed with following the three principles: 1) create a safe practical situation close to teacher teaching; 2) various ways to guide teachers to reflect; 3) thematic guidance and support shall be provided.

Creating a safe practical situation close to teachers' teaching

Design is the first step of facilitation. Effective facilitation needs a learner-centered design and restrict to the principle of confidentiality. Thus, it can create a safe and trusted teaching laboratory for teachers, and maximize teachers' subjectivity. In other words, teachers must be present, teach and experience in person, so as to construct their own knowledge and experience system thoughtfully and actively. Since teachers' perplexities and problems can only be expressed in specific teaching situations, specific teaching situations need to be designed in teacher development projects.

The design of practice situations for facilitation needs follow the following three principles. First of all, the problem situation originated in the real practice of teachers, so the practical situation encourages teachers teach and exposed problems in practical situations. In this way, facilitators can provide a starting point for reflection. Second, teachers try to solve the concrete teaching problems need to return to the education practice, rather than empty talking. So when designing practice situation, facilitators must have teachers take the initiative to improve, such as ISW workshop design more than one mini teaching in teaching practice, not only for teachers to provide an opportunity to practice, also for teachers to try to solve the problem of practice opportunities. In ISW workshops, facilitators emphasize that the three-day workshop is a teaching laboratory that encourages constant challenge and experimentation with new teaching methods. Third, due to teachers' unique teaching wisdom’s critical status in practical field, the purpose of facilitation is not only help teachers to find and solve problems, but also an opportunity to explore themselves, to find themselves as a unique talent, to maintain their advantage and confidence, and finally self-improved.
Multiple ways to facilitate teachers' reflection

Effective facilitation offered multiple ways to promote teachers’ reflection. In an ISW workshop, there are many kinds feedbacks for a teacher to reflect on his or her own teaching. First, the written feedback which is from peers as students. Second, the verbal feedback from peers as students in the small-group discussion. Third, the video feedback of his or her teaching. Every teacher will get his or her mini-lesson video every day, and taking it as a tool to reflect on his or her own teaching. Besides, facilitators present an active learning methods model, and showing student-centered teaching concepts and methods. It is from these elements, the teacher gradually learned to think about their own teaching from different angles, reflect on his own philosophy of education, and have the opportunity to try new methods based on the feedbacks.

Targeted facilitation with teaching analysis model

Any teacher development program needs to take into account the characteristics and needs of the group of teachers or individuals it serves in order to be targeted. The facilitation on teaching is targeted because an effective teaching model is used in help analyze teacher’s teaching. The BOPPPS model divides effective teaching into 6 consecutive links, including Bridge in, Objective/Outcome, pre-assessment, Participatory Learning, Post-assessment and Summery. Because the BOPPPS model is more compatible with the disciplines of higher education, participants are generally encouraged to use it as an effective instructional design model in ISW to think, design, prepare, and implement 10-minute mini-lectures. ISW designers believe that a teacher's teaching is effective if he or she can incorporate these six elements in the design and implementation skillfully of his or her own teaching.

In the past three years, a few universities in China have also tried to implement this teaching design model in the new teaching ability improvement project for teachers, and according to the feedback from teachers, this model is easily recognized by new teachers, because it can indeed help new teachers adapt to teaching quickly and effectively. However, it is also found in practice that a small number of experienced teachers have doubts about BOPPPS, believing that there is no fixed form of excellent teaching, and that BOPPPS teaching model is too rigid in dividing teaching machinery. However, one experienced facilitator have different oppions about this, and argues:
“The difference between the new and old teachers’ views on the simplified teaching model only strengthens the significance of the model for the teaching development of new teachers, and reminds us that when providing teaching support to a group of teachers, we need to provide theme-based and targeted projects from the perspective of the teachers.”

“...the new teacher as a teaching novice, just like the piano novice students. BOPPPS for the new teacher is like the piano beginner practice repertoire for the piano novice students, it is the basic teaching skills. No piano coach can ask a beginner to play difficult pieces and to play them with ease. In the same way, if we tries to force the novice teacher to understand the principles and connotations of all kinds of teaching by means of theoretical indoctrination before he has participated in teaching, leaving him with the impression that teaching is vast, varied and unfathomable at the same time, it is obviously not more helpful. If so, the result would be that the new teacher does not know how to choose the various teaching methods mentioned in the lecture in the real teaching situation, and does not know how to deal with the problems arising at any time in the real teaching.”

Therefore, to provide appropriate teaching support for new teachers, teaching must be viewed from their starting point and perspective, not from the perspective of experts or senior teachers. In addition, due to the lack of teaching experience of new teachers, the content of teaching support provided for new teachers should be basic, accurate, easy to understand and grasp, rather than abstract, requiring a lot of teaching experience to resonate to understand. The design of the simplified teaching model has provided a framework for facilitation, and realized this.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Initial design of ISW is aimed at the teaching skills of novice teachers, and its primary goal is to help novice teachers to be competent for teaching work quickly. But early participants found the advantages of the program for teacher development, suggesting that ISW can be extended from novice teachers to experienced teachers, and that ISW be designed to be flexible enough to accommodate different subjects in higher education, as well as faculty at different levels of experience. In ISW, facilitators are university peers instead of educational experts. The ISW series is embodied in the
building of community through peer support and school-based practice leaded reflection. Through facilitation, teachers perfectly covered three levels of learning, that is, from "spontaneous learning" to "eager to study", and then to "teaching others". When a teacher can point out the teaching strengths of their peers and areas for improvement, his or her own teaching abilities improve. During the facilitation, the teacher-student relationship, and the hidden contents and nonverbal behaviors of each guide of ISW workshops can be a good supplement to promote teachers' reflection.

Looking back at the history of teacher development, we can find that the academic filed is gradually realizing the complexity of educational practice and the affirmation of the value of individual teachers in practice. Because the high barriers between different disciplines in higher education, the teacher educators cannot provide effective guidance for teaching in all disciplines. Thus, the value of individual phronesis become even critical for university teachers. Facilitators’ neutral role is effective because it arouses teacher’s subjectivity to reflect and make positive change. Through the three level goals of facilitation, teacher's reflection goes deeper and deeper. Finally, neutral facilitation helps teachers form a habit of pursuing continuous self-improvement, which is the most fundamental foothold in university teacher development.

**Limitations**

With the time limited, some data analysis has not been fully developed, especially the effect of the neutral role needs to be further explored. The author will keep working on it. It is expected to provide practical guidance for the development of teachers in colleges and universities.

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educational ecology and school reform, proper facilitation can enable teachers to share, reflect and refine their own educational experience, so as to achieve the combination of self-realization and professional development. Starting from humanistic teacher education, this paper holds that facilitation needs teacher educators’ "no-self" status, and its core is to support teachers from a neutral position. The paper also analyzes the key elements of facilitation as an educational practice method, aiming to provide reference for the practice of teacher education and teacher educators' own growth.