

Investigation of Experiential Learning in Higher Education in Japan: Focusing on the Career Design of Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract : *This paper aims to investigate “experiential learning” from the perspective of the career design of students by examining five short case reports in order to assess those volunteers who have come into contact with children both within and outside the school environment. The findings of this study reveal that students are capable of overcoming the easy image of youth, and promote the volition that actualizes their perspective with experiential learning.*

Key Words : Experiential learning, Career design, Pre-service teacher

1. Introduction

The concern for particular subjects offered by schools as a part of their curriculum has been increasing over the past few decades. There has been both a quantitative and qualitative diversification in curriculums, and non-attendance has been a particular problem for many schools. In addition, there has been an increasing tendency for overusing the term PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder) without knowing its exact meaning. Correspondingly, autistic spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome, AD/HD (Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder), and LD (Learning Disorders, Learning Disabilities) have continued to attract attention. Moreover, since parents can be a source of important information, communication with students suffering from the abovementioned conditions may be useful for schoolteachers. The adoption of foreign language activities in elementary education has also led to the expectation that teachers should adopt a more international outlook. Consequently, the teaching profession has become more diversified and complex, and the burden associated with this trend is continuing to increase. Despite this, young teachers are invariably

expected to be sufficiently prepared and ready to begin functioning with immediate effect. On the other hand, in many teacher-training courses at conventional universities, the classroom lecture continues to be pivotal in terms of learning about basic theory with regard to pedagogy. Yet, the kind of instruction involved is invariably not commensurate with the approach and outlook followed in schools where it is expected that the existing practical skills of teachers will be sufficient to cope with the immediate and changing needs of schools. Internship, which may help improve teaching practice, has therefore been implemented in an effort to remedy this situation. Internship in Japan, however, has only recently been introduced to the extent that the content of most courses continues to be subject oriented and pedagogically centered, with in many cases students failing to acquire experience as guidance counselors. With regard to students on teacher training courses, and in reply to the Educational Personnel Training Council of 1997, it was emphasized that setting up opportunities to support practical leadership through experiential learning was important, such as coming into contact with and understanding the feelings and behavior of children. With respect to this reply, it was

recommended that, in relation to school volunteers and school internships, college student should enter schools and actively engage with children (MEXT, 1997). College students would thereby be able to connect with children in various ways over a sustained period. According to the views held by those in charge of the promotion of internship by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Labor (at that point), internship can be defined as engaging in employment experience relevant to one's specialty and future career. As school volunteers also interact with children before becoming employed as teachers, experiential learning as assessed in the present paper will therefore also include school volunteers.

Matsuura (2003), through carrying out a case study, considered that the school volunteer should come under the auspices of the department of teacher training and therefore proposed that the abilities of students should undergo improvement in three main areas, (1) ability to respond personally, (2) capacity to understand the student, and (3) problem-solving. It was also pointed out that volunteer activity could be useful as part of the wider school support service, other than just in terms of practicing teaching, that can provide a new way to improve teacher training. Moreover, Ito (2003) highlighted the importance of experiential education by referring to a U.S. example for comparing volunteer activity in university education. According to Ito, experiential learning involves 1) both intellectual and holistic experiences that tap the full potential of an individual including sensitivity, 2) verbalization of personal experience through the ability to reflect, 3) understanding the relationship of these three factors within an academic framework, and 4) preparation for experience that is firmly based on understanding. Ito indicated that "refraction," as well as the existence of a supervisor who makes the process possible, are especially important. It could, however, be said that this merely represents an improvement to higher education in Japan. In addition, Eyler (2009) emphasized, "experiential education, which takes students into the community, helps students both to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use." Eyler also provided several examples as to the importance of experiential education for higher education. Thus, experiential education can provide a deeper understanding of a subject than class study alone, as well as improve the capacity for critical thinking and the application of

knowledge in the face of complex or ambiguous situations, which also provides an opportunity to engage in lifelong learning, including learning in the workplace. Although experiential learning is evidently being planned at an institution level, a practical program has not yet been put into place largely. Moreover, experiential learning, which provides full contact with children in contexts other than school, has rarely been accomplished. By supporting practical engagement with teacher training courses in the future through concurrently creating opportunities to interface with actually standing on that occasion, this kind of learning leads to supporting a career design. This paper thus seeks to investigate "experiential learning" from the perspective of how this affects a student's career planning. In this regard, five short case reports will be described in relation to actual experiential learning where a student teacher has interacted with children both in and outside the school environment.

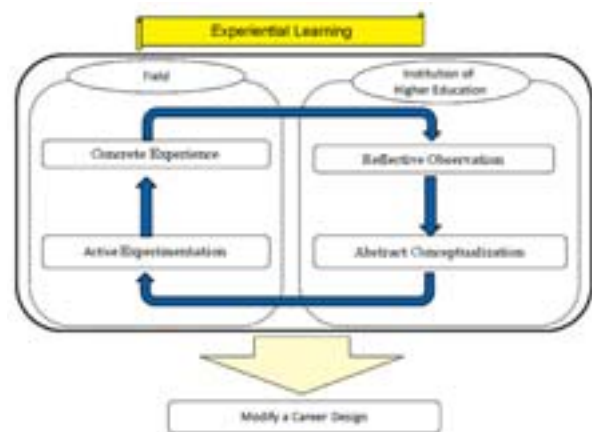


Figure 1 Experiential Learning in Higher Education (we made it from Kolb1984)

2. Case Studies

As there was not enough space available for all the results of the case studies to be considered, only five subjects attending three locations where experiential learning took place were selected.

(1) Experiential Learning in an Incorporated Nonprofit Organization

In 2002, the Department of Literature at Ritsumeikan University created an internship that was linked to a nonprofit organization (NPO). The main activity of the NPO concerned supporting issues surrounding non-attendance and the youth service and offered a post for the purpose of engaging in experiential learning in the

following two enterprises. The university was mainly concerned with developing the following six activities; (1) prior instruction and guidance, (2) real practical experience in a NPO, (3) training and exchange meetings over an intermediate period, (4) interim report meeting, (5) final report meeting, and (6) writing a short thesis based on personal experiences and training. Within the NPO, which was linked to experiential learning, the staff held meetings twice a month in each organization in order to encourage greater reflection on the part of staff, and discussed the user's needs and the purpose of the project. The first author of the present study was involved in the NPO at that time and participated in the internship for the purpose of coordinating and supervising staff.

i. Enterprise of child's hall in mid-evening

This consists of an exchange support enterprise for a junior-and-senior-high-school-students linked with a children's hall and NPO in Kyoto city. Staff promote mutual exchange of students from various backgrounds with a particular concern for the age of students.

ii. Enterprise of learning assistant

This is a project relevant to a high school that conformed to the credit course system in Shiga Prefecture and was tied to a NPO, and supports students on such a course. A feature of the credit course system is that it consists of many students who had experienced non-attendance before attending high school.

Moreover, because of unit system, there are spare times like a university, and the student hall for spending these times is installed. In a student hall, staffs support students and consulate everyday learning, and perform the plan of extracurricular activities.

Case 1. Experiential learner, Ms. Momoko

Ms. Momoko majored in Human Science, and participated in the NPO as an internship student on two occasions while in second grade (sophomore). Following the end of the internship, she continued to participate in the project as a member of staff. Through such experience as a juvenile, she was encouraged to enter the teaching profession and thereby decided to transfer to studying pedagogy in third grade rather than continuing with Human Science. This student was then

able to obtain teaching qualifications for teaching in both elementary and middle schools, and now works as an elementary school teacher in the Dominican Republic through the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers organization.

Case2. Experiential learner, Mr. Kazuya

Mr. Kazuya majored in the Study of Education and participated in the NPO as an internship student while in second grade. As well as the two abovementioned projects, he also participated in activities supporting children with a record of non-attendance, and additionally became involved in the individual home visit scheme (MEET), eventually becoming one of the key staff members of this particular NPO. Letting relation by the juvenile who holds subjects, such as non-attendance, this student was thereby inspired to attend graduate school where he studied clinical psychology, and now works as a school counselor.

(2) Experiential Learning at an Adaptation School Outline

In fiscal year 2008, the Teacher Training Course for Primary Education at Ritsumeikan University and the Kyoto City Board of Education were linked together, and students on the course benefited from experiential learning as members of staff of an adaptation school. In such establishments, the staffs provide support with regard to the psychological needs of juveniles, as well as aspects of study, care, commitment to school life, and improving social skills. The real aim of the center concerns assisting juvenile students by communicating with them on an equal footing and to advise or consult with the supervisors on the board-of-education by exchanging information on a daily basis. Case conferences additionally take place from time to time with the Kyoto City Board of Education. The first author of this paper has been involved in introducing the staff of this adaptation school to course students, and has participated in the above-mentioned case conferences, etc.

Case 3. Experiential learner, Mr. Naoto

Mr. Naoto studied on the Teacher Training Course for Primary Education and became a member of staff at first grade. Although he had already been a third grade student, he has acted as the staff continuously. During the case conference, this student stated the following, "I realized the difficulty concerned in keeping an appropriate distance with juvenile students who were experiencing great distress through communicating with them while at adaptation school." Mr. Naoto was also involved with

extracurricular activities as well as an independence seminar that he participated in with great enthusiasm, and advances course curriculum to become an elementary school teacher.

Case 4. Experiential learner, Mr. Yukio

Mr. Yukio was a student on a Teacher Training Course for Primary Education. He became a member of staff at second grade. Although he already became a fourth grader student, he has acted as the staff continuously. During one case conference, this student stated that “my attitude toward learning while on a teacher training course changed when I realized how difficult teaching can be. What can I do to them now?”

Following this experience, this particular student endeavored to procure a qualification for teaching at a special school for children with special needs, and the student is involved in organizing study meetings in preparation for the teacher employment examination.

(3) Experiential Learning in a Public Elementary School in the North East of Thailand

Outline

In cooperation with Khon Kaen University, Ritsumeikan University college students visited the North East of Thailand, where they presented a series of lessons about Japanese culture at a public school. Having prepared in advance in Japan, the participating students also held a meeting to consider how lessons could be improved ahead of each class. The present authors were engaged in assisting the students with the draft plan, and acted as leaders, as well as providing instruction and advice during the meetings.

Case 5. Experiential learner, Mr. Satoru

Mr. Satoru was a student on the Teacher Training Course for Primary Education. He became a member of staff while in second grade, played an active role, and became a key associate. In one of the feedback meetings, he stated, “Although I obviously had many weaknesses,

I felt a sense of accomplishment in struggling to excel for the sake of the Thai students.” Following this experience, he sought to gain a qualification to teach at an elementary school, and checks the work in connection with an international volunteer or international cooperation to get the job in the future.

3. Concluding Remarks

With regard to experiential learning in higher education, it is crucial that students are able to make real contact with juveniles in a way that is directly related to the prospective service and profession in which they seek to become engaged. Until the experiential learning, it is not surpassed an imagination what the theoretical lecture of the college makes. For example, Case 1 and Case 2 demonstrate how experiential learning can bring a previously idealized concept of youth closer to that of reality. Similarly, by what they practice the teaching method and how to contact the students that they learn in higher education, they take the major of themselves. Case 3 and Case 4 provide good examples of this tendency in the sense that students were able to gain a greater awareness as well as counteract a lack of knowledge and experience through participating in experiential schemes. These case studies therefore show that experiential learning, when linked to the prospective profession of students, can help promote greater enthusiasm and commitment in students. In addition, becoming involved in situations where professionals are already engaged in real work can provide students with a better idea as what to expect from their chosen career. A number of case studies have, however, indicated that career choice can differ depending on whether experiential learning has taken place or not. Such an example can be found in Case 1 where meeting with actual juveniles gave rise to an emotional reaction that led to the student concerned deciding to change career course. In this respect, it is not until students have engaged in experiential learning that career preferences are able to be decided and reliable career choices can be made. The educator must, therefore, possess a clear understanding of the career plans that students are attempting to follow. Secondly, programs should be readily available to students that match their career plans. It should further be noted that the purpose of experiential learning is not merely to gain experience, but also provides a way of learning about one’s own potential and



limitations. Having benefited from such experiences, students should, as a result, be better able to make a more informed choice regarding career plans. The assignment hereafter is that we develop the experiential learning program fitting career design in higher education.

Note

The students' names cited in the case reports are pseudonyms that have been employed to protect personal information.

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要 約

本稿の目的は、学校の内外で子ども達と触れ合うボランティア活動を評価する上での5つの事例報告を通して、キャリアデザインの観点から将来教職に就くことを志望する学生の体験的学習のあり方を探究することである。結果として、体験的学習には、学生が子ども達についての安易なイメージを払拭し、自らの将来を実現する意志を強固にする効果があることを指摘した。(枝広和憲, 小原 豊)