

Report on Faculty Development Practices through the Class Visit Project

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Abstract : *In this paper, I will report on the “University Class Visit Project,” which has been ongoing at the University of Kyoto since 2000 and at Naruto University of Education since 2002, and on innovations in faculty development practices based on this project. I will also identify problems and raise issues related to this matter, and promote discussions with the participants in this meeting.*

Key Words : Faculty Development, Class improvement, Class Visit, University Reform, Collegiality

1. Introduction

In previous attempts to promote faculty development practices in the absence of any special administrative bodies (e.g., University Education Centers), special committees and individuals often had to take on additional responsibilities, despite already bearing heavy workloads. It is clear that many teachers making their best efforts as individuals or as teachers acting as committee members were driven by their strong sense of vocation to do whatever they could for university education, but at universities where I have presented lectures about faculty development, I often heard comments to the following effect : “My students were happy to hear that I quit as a committee member, because I could get back to them” or “I’ll do what I can for the next three months (until my term on the committee end), and then I’ll get back to my research.”

According to a survey carried out at a university where I used to be on staff, when teachers were asked what they thought was necessary in order to improve university education, 70% mentioned a “curtailment of duties not related to research or teaching.”¹⁾

We can presume that these circumstances are common to most universities throughout Japan. Under these conditions, the teachers involved in the Faculty Development practices I mentioned earlier coped with both their busy work schedules and faculty development matters by consciously sacrificing their own interests.

There is a limit, however, to how long you can sacrifice your own interests. Devoting one’s efforts to improving education through faculty development practices means there is insufficient time for preparing one’s own lessons, and leaves teachers grappling with the contradiction that their lessons are actually getting worse. In the future, in order to establish a broader base for faculty development, we must resolve issues with a full awareness that we can no longer ignore these types of problems and contradictions, which come about as a result of the sacrifices made by individual teachers. The question is how to strike a balance between the pressure of work and faculty development.

One way of resolving this problem is to use some form of incentive to encourage efforts targeting improvements in education from outside the realm of university education practice. Kazuhiko Shimizu acknowledges that “to give stimulating lessons every day is an extremely heavy burden that each and every teacher must bear,” but at the same time points out that “on the other hand, in order to ensure that teachers are able to meet this goal, some kind of systemized measures or support systems are also necessary”. He recommends the following:

1. Functional specialization in areas of education and research.
2. Implementation of innovations in education on a trial basis.
3. Establishing systems for the evaluation of education.²⁾

In particular, the establishment of an evaluation

system as mentioned in point 3 is expected to become a fairly effective measure, should it be developed. Naruto University of Education is currently investigating the concept of incorporating the evaluation of education into systems for allocating research funds based on performance, and, being a pioneer among Japanese national universities in this regard, has attracted a great deal of attention. Currently, however, we must maintain an awareness that we have not yet sufficiently overcome the difficulties of evaluating education objectively, while taking into consideration such factors as specific academic fields and the students involved. It follows that there is another method to be considered; that is, to seek a way of improving education by tackling it from the perspective of those already involved in the practice of university education—in other words, a bottom-up approach.

In this report, based on an awareness of these issues, I shall specifically discuss the potential of a trial system for improving university education—referred to as the “University Class Visit Project”—the starting point for which is to have fellow teachers become involved in the practices of other teachers’ individual classes. I would also like to highlight some of the difficulties related to this project.

2. Becoming Involved in the Inner Workings of Practical University Education

One issue that has long been considered a crucial one in the context of improving university education is: How do we approach the subject of improving classes with proud teachers who conduct their lessons within the confines of a strong belief that “the classroom is sacred”³⁾? In her “Research into the improvement of university teaching through video recording of the lesson study process,” Hideko It proposes self-modeling by professors, in which these teachers watch their own lessons on video and “correct themselves by watching themselves.”⁴⁾ With regard to the troublesome question of teachers’ pride, this approach allows individuals to explore solutions within the scope of their own classrooms; in that sense, this method could be extremely effective. This approach will be particularly beneficial in the case of teachers who are predisposed to self-examination, and who are familiar with handling the equipment so can implement this method with little difficulty. There are, however, a number of problems with this approach that remain unresolved. For example: Some teachers

may find it troublesome to record their own classes on video, while for others, having a video camera set up in the classroom can limit the teacher’s ability to act naturally. Some classes may have been so bad that the teacher is ashamed of it; having such a lesson over and done, it may be difficult to go back watch it again. Even if that teacher does manage to watch home server own video, he may search for some justification for his mistakes, or may end up discouraged by an irreparable blunder, feeling exhausted by what may seem like hopeless, solitary work. All of these problems refer to the limitations of resolutions that are dependent on the individual.

The “Tips for Growth” project, undertaken by the Center for the Studies of Higher Education, Nagoya University, encouraged experimentation in the classroom even while maintaining the belief that “the classroom is sacred”. In this project, useful segments of a lesson were made publicly available on a Web page. This page has reportedly been accessed an average of more than 20,000 times each month since the project began in April 2000. The good thing about this approach is that the Web page can be accessed easily and it can be done anonymously. There is, however, another way of looking at this; namely, that looking at a home page is seen as an acquittal. While one cannot deny that simply accessing this site may be cause for reflection, this reflection will almost certainly be shallow, given that the viewer is distanced from the other teacher in the video. If this is the case, the viewer could hardly be blamed for gaining a strange kind of peace of mind, knowing that he was not alone in the errors he had made. Another major problem is that implementing improvements to one’s classes after accessing the homepage could very well lead to an even stronger tendency for that teacher to be closed and defensive with regard to those improvements. An awareness of “the other” and communication with other teachers are essential to improving classes, and by extension to Faculty Development, but these factors cannot necessarily be derived through the use of a homepage. The Center is currently developing an online project called the “Going Syllabus” based on the “Tips for Growth” project⁵⁾. The Going Syllabus project has three main goals: (1) to establish the skills for writing syllabuses that will lead to successful classes (courseware for teachers); (2) to encourage active communications between teachers and students; and (3) to enable the sharing of files between teachers and students. In

contrast to its predecessor, the route taken by this project is one of making improvements to classes by promoting a clear awareness of the student as “the other.” In this respect, there are high expectations for future developments. In recent years, there have been attempts to create more open classes by holding “open class weeks,” but this is an open classroom in only the simplest sense of the term; there is no added element of deliberation by another party. This cannot be considered an entirely ineffective approach, but given the tension of “not knowing who will walk into the classroom, or when,” and the rejection of the sanctity of the classroom, there is surely much room for reassessment from the perspective of Faculty Development. It is not so rare to invite “others” into one’s classroom, or to view classes being conducted by “others.” Stated bluntly, anyone can lay himself open for others to see.

The problem is whether the teacher has a relationship with this other, whether there is sufficient awareness, and whether this awareness will promote self-reflection. Substantial results have been achieved in all these areas in recent years. Here, we present an opportunity to become involved in the inner workings of the practice of university education, which in the past has come to be characterized as “closed.” At Harvard University’s Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, immediately after a class is finished, the professor and a teacher from the center watch a video of that class, and review the class through discussions between these two individuals. Supported by the Center’s activities, the Carnegie Foundation Knowledge Media Laboratory offers teaching portfolios and studies via the following homepage:

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/KML/index.htm>

In France, ADMES (Association pour le Développement des Méthodes de l’Enseignement Supérieur) reports upon and studies classroom practices. In Japan, Kazuko Sawamoto is undertaking trials of classroom reflection using classes recorded on digital video disks. Temporary data from the classroom is recorded on these DVDs, including: images from the classroom, audio recordings, records made by the teacher (journals, etc.), records made by students (notes, etc.), records made by observers, and comments by visitors. After the class is finished, the teacher reviews the class along with a researcher using the data recorded on the DVD ⁶⁾.

Based on an awareness of the issues outlined above, the concept of the Class Visit Project is to invite casual

visits by an “other”-in this case, a fellow teacher from the same university-into the daily classroom setting, so as to promote reflection on the class by the individual teachers in a relaxed manner. The acceptance of this “other” also provides an opportunity to establish links with the practices of other teachers.

3. Outline of the Class Visit Project at Naruto University of Education

Naruto University of Education established “Open Class Weeks” starting from 2001. I viewed this as an excellent opportunity to conduct class visits, and, considering it a part of my own newly assigned research, I sent the following e-mail to the teachers whose classes I wanted to observe.

To: Prof. XXXXX

Regarding request to visit your class

Please forgive the unannounced mail. My name is Masao Ishimura, and I have been in charge of the School Improvement Course since October 1st. During my previous tenure at Kyoto University, I was affiliated with the Research Center for Higher Education, which was responsible for supporting teachers at the University in improving and developing their classes. I was involved in the research and practice of Faculty Development, through the media of research in open classes and Class Visits.

I recently heard that Naruto University of Education also conducts “Open Class Weeks,” and after checking the schedules, found that you have classes as noted below. I would very much like to visit one of these classes. Furthermore, if it is not too much of an imposition, I would like to meet with you after the class is finished, even for just a few minutes, to hear your comments and impressions on that class.

Once again, I apologize for making this request on such short notice, but I would be very grateful if you could assist me in this regard.

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In a number of cases, I had difficulty in coordinating class schedules, which made it impossible to visit these classes. In the end, I was fortunate enough to be able to visit seven classes. Following is an outline of the Visit procedure. The class was observed from the back of the room, with records made on a "Class Participation Record" form (A4 size, comprised of 4-5 pages). Recorded information included: Name of the class, date and period of the visit, name of the instructor, name of the recording party, number of students in the class, and number of registered students, as well as the flow of the class over time, main events during the class, topics, teacher's behavior (questions, explanations), students called upon, managing behaviors and related issues, and appearance of the students (were they facing the front, speaking, taking notes, talking privately, engaged in behaviors unrelated to the topic, etc.). I also recorded my own impressions and feelings about the class. After the class was finished, in cases where I had the teacher's consent, I asked the teacher to give his impressions of the class, and to answer a number of other questions.

Student Reflection Sheet (A4 version)

Starting with the general request that "We would appreciate your feedback when this class is finished," we had the students fill in the form using free essay style, describing their thoughts on the following three areas. Quotations are examples of the types of phrasings that the students used.

- 1) Things you have learnt and discovered: "Ahh, now I understand"; "The reason for this is..." "This means ..." "In other words..."
- 2) Questions you had when the class was finished, and things you want to check with the teacher: "I don't understand..." "Doesn't this mean...?" "But isn't this ...?" "What happens if...?" "I though this meant...?"
- 3) Things you'd like to think about more or investigate further now that the class is over: "I'd like to think more about ..." "I'd like to consider the case of ..." "I'd like to read further about ..." "I'm going to review..."

Following is a summary of the knowledge I have gained through class visits. This will be discussed in more detail later, but the following descriptions apply to the various classes that I have observed as a class visitor.

The thing that was on my mind most throughout all the classes was that since beginning my tenure at Naruto

University of Education, I have often heard reports of dissatisfaction; namely, that "students don't do any work outside of class." For example, even if students are given instructions to read the handouts distributed, they haven't done so. Regarding this point, in the classes I was able to visit, the teachers were able to effectively stimulate the thinking of the students even if they hadn't read the handouts in advance, and the students were taking an active role in class. This situation, however, has the potential to create a vicious circle in which students can understand the class even if they haven't read the handouts in advance, which in turn means that there is no reason for them to read the assigned material. This said, the question of "whether to move ahead with the class even when students don't understand content" is a very troublesome one for teachers, and presents a difficult problem. In a similar vein, there is the complaint that students don't review previous lessons, but in the real classroom environment the lessons from the previous class are carefully summarized, such that students can follow the classes easily without doing any review. In order to ensure that the students feel the need to review their lessons, it may be better not to summarize previous lessons in such detail. In these classes, however, the thing that we must recognize as lacking is found in structure of the lessons, as mentioned earlier. All of the classes I visited were filled with new ideas and approaches that shook up the student's preconceptions and provided them with a new framework for experimentation, but at the same time, another problem is present: because the lessons are complete nearly to the point of perfection, and because of the wealth of teaching strategies used in class, the students are not induced to study autonomously outside of the classroom.

4. Discussions

(1) Talking about the Classes

In this report I visited classes with the perspective of a student (an internal perspective), and from the perspective of a person unable to completely become a student; that is, as a visitor (with a bird's-eye perspective). For this reason, however, I cannot deny that the words and stories that I used when I talked about the classes in the preceding paragraph are, after all, my own. With an awareness of this limitation, I conducted dialogues with the teachers, bringing into the classroom the perspective

of “another.” This is valuable in terms of revitalizing the latent ability of both the observer and the professors, who tend to be caught up in the practices of day-to-day life and thus restricted to an internal perspective, to rise above the more mundane aspects of education and see the larger picture.

Furthermore, when conducting interviews after the classes, I refrained from focusing on questions related to improving the classes themselves. The rationale behind this was that I felt an excessive number of comments on areas needing improvement would detract from the sense of achievement the class offers, and thus missing out on the opportunity for reflection. In my experience as a lecturer in open test classes at the university where I taught previously, I often felt that the last thing I wanted was to have problems enumerated for me immediately after a class. In the process of preparing and carrying out classes, the teacher has already reflected sufficiently on his class, through an awareness that the class is being seen through the eyes of someone other than the students (i.e., the visitor’s eyes) . In this sense, while this may not apply to all problems in the classroom the teacher has already taken note of the problems that become apparent through this type of classroom format. I believe that pointing out a series of problems would in fact make it less likely that the teacher would become aware of problems that he had in fact not noticed before.⁷⁾ This problem, however, remains as an issue for practical studies in this field; namely, that if the basis for improvements is to be the teacher’s ability to notice problems himself, then pointing out at least some areas that warrant improvements may be effective in promoting this process. I believe that this issue is worthy of further study. For the teachers whose classes I visited, having their classes observed and talking about those classes with a fellow teacher meant “putting their own classes into words.” By talking, they became more aware of their own classes; they were able to remove themselves from the picture, which in turn enables differentiation of, and reflection upon, their own classes. In the case of these class visits, I conducted interviews regarding the classes immediately after they were completed, in the teacher’s own labs. Through this process, we were able to share perspectives regarding the classes from the point of view of the observer and the observed. In all cases, the teachers were direct and honest about their reflection on their classes, and they talked at length about their thoughts on the classes in

particular, and their personal feelings about education in general.

I believe that this success is dependent on the observer sharing the world of the classroom with the teacher. Based on this premise, the teacher reflects upon his own experiences in the class, thus making them more real, and creating a single flow that forms a complete “story” for that teacher; at the same time, this creates a similar story for the observer as well.

Throughout the course of the project, in the interviews following the classes, it was not necessary for me to forcefully draw out comments from the teachers. I was not there as a student, or as a teacher; I was simply there as a person sharing the experience of the class, and listening to the teacher as he spoke. This approach can be viewed as being similar to counseling, and is something I would like to explore further in the future.

(2) Class Observation Issues Concerning Professionalism and Collegiality

When visiting classes, I do not provide instruction for the teacher, nor am I able to do so, but at times, the teacher being observed is seeking the perspective of a specialist. For example, there were numerous cases in which the teacher said, ‘I’m a complete novice when it comes to teaching methodology. I just tend to do as I see others do, but please don’t hesitate to tell me of any problems, or anything else you notice, about my current lecturing methods.’

Palmer says, “The advice of specialists is not very useful. There are two goals a teacher should strive for if he wants to improve his skills: to better understand himself, and to establish a bond with his colleagues.”⁸⁾ Nevertheless, I have never, under any circumstances, had the desire to play the role of Palmer’s class ‘specialist.’ The Education Support Center at the Tokai University provides the following example of such an approach: “A number of people on the teaching staff who possess exceptional classroom know-how are selected as coordinators to take on the role of ‘Teacher for Instructors,’ providing detailed teaching guidance on classroom methods, and offering advice. In addition to providing know-how-including skills in the effective use of blackboards-through training seminars and other venues, these teachers introduce classroom methods that have received positive responses from students, such as debates and outdoor fieldwork.”⁹⁾ During my visits, I did not adopt these techniques, nor could I have. The thing I kept in mind most while visiting the classes

was to place importance upon the style of the classes in question. During the course of the Class Visit Project at Kyoto University, Professor Tanaka of the Research Center for Higher Education frequently made comments to the following effect: "One should conduct debates about a given class within the scope of that class's unique style." "There is no single class model that can be applied to every teacher. If you force such a model upon a teacher, that teacher's unique style will perish." "The most important element of Faculty Development is discussions in which those involved show respect for the styles of others." I conducted my visits within this framework, and in that sense, my role as observer was to promote reflection on the part of the teacher conducting the class I was visiting. Even so, the visitor is more than simply a catalyst; he provides "collegiality" with an added element of "specialization." If the visitor is not careful, these two elements can quickly fall into a contradictory relationship. A misdirected emphasis on specialization can make collegiality difficult, while excessive collegiality detracts from the meaning of specialization. Speaking from my experience, I would have to say that the substance of specialization most likely refers to the specialized skills of a person who has visited many university classes, has conducted classes personally, and has had his own classes observed, and who has succeeded in establishing a general theoretical framework incorporating all these elements. I believe that for those of us specializing in education, "specialization" in the context of classroom visits supports education as a whole through the basics of educational theory, but by no means represents the true substance of education itself.

(3) Faculty Development that Emphasizes Personal Achievements by University Teaching Staff in Eliminating the Feeling of Being Overwhelmed by the Instructor's Workload: Establishing a Cooperative System Based on Mutual Class Visits

When we think about the current level of Faculty Development in Japan, we can assume that when teachers come to a deeper understanding of themselves, they will be able to meaningful self-understanding depends on how the teaching staff express their own true individuality, and that "this individuality will give rise to exceptional classes."¹⁰ Based on this awareness, P. J. Palmer has explained the importance of cooperative systems among fellow teachers as a means of supporting this emphasis on individuality. Specifically, Palmer has

stated that "Fellow teachers should take a more active role in observing and discussing each other's classes," and that "Improvements in classes come about through sincere dialogue and the sharing of experiences among teachers."¹¹ Palmer thus proposes that further studies in this mutual observation process should be promoted. He also states that talking about classes will make these classes visible to the outside world where in the past they had never been exposed to such scrutiny, and that this visibility will in turn lead to even more valuable connections. Studies are being undertaken with regard to how best to establish organized systems for this process of mutual observation. At the beginning of this report, I discussed how teachers' feelings of being overly busy hinder the progress of Faculty Development. I believe that this approach of "teachers talking about classes among themselves," in the form that I have conceived and improved upon, will lead to even better classes in the future, and will in turn increase the level of satisfaction among these teachers. I also believe that this will represent a successful endeavor for university teaching staff in terms of personal achievements, and will far outweigh the stress of the teaching staff's substantial workload.

Finally, although somewhat outside the scope of classroom practices, I would like to discuss the issue of improving education as viewed from a broader perspective. By this I mean incorporating student's reflections on learning into a trial implementation of Faculty Development that is based on the foundations of these class visits. If approached incorrectly, class visits, the teachers' reflections on these visits, and the process of improving classes have the potential to inhibit autonomous learning by the student. We would hope that the result of teachers' reflection would be to "leave certain things up to the students," but more importantly, we should keep in mind that we will only achieve progress in improving the function of university education as a whole when the students reflect on their own learning in a given classroom and "improve their learning," (as they should be doing in any case), and when this process is combined with the reflections and classroom improvements on the part of the teachers.

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要 約

本稿は、鳴門教育大学におけるFD活動としての、教員による授業の相互観察を通しての授業改善活動の概要を報告し、その到達点、課題を明らかにしたものである。同僚教員の授業を観察し、その後、それを基にして授業についての議論を行うことは、授業者、観察者双方の授業についての自省を促し、授業改善に繋がる事が明らかにされているが、併せて、授業を見る専門性と同僚性の関係、授業参観をいかにして組織化していくのか等、いくつかの問題点も明らかにされている。

(石村雅雄)

Class Visit Record

Name of the class:

Date and Period of the Visit:

Name of the instructor:

Name of the recording party:

Number of students in the class:

Number of registered students:

the flow of the class over time	main events during the class, topics, teacher's behavior	appearance of the students	my own impressions and feelings about the class

Student Reflection Sheets

Name:

Name of the class:

Date and Period:

We would appreciate your feedback when this class is finished. Please write down your thoughts on the following three areas.

1) What are things you have learnt and discovered? (for example: "Ahh, now I understand ...", "The reason for this is ...", "This means ...", "In other words, ...")

2) What are questions you had when the class was finished, and things you want to check with the teacher? (for example: "I don't understand ...", "Doesn't this mean ...?", "But isn't this ...?", "What happens if ...?", "I thought this meant ...?")

3) What are things you'd like to think about more or investigate further now that the class is over? (for example: "I'd like to think more about ...", "I'd like to consider the case of ...", "I'd like to read further about ...", "I'm going to review ...")

Thank you for your cooperation!