

A CHARACTERISTIC WAY OF CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN CHINA: THE PRACTICE AND ENLIGHTENMENT FROM THE NATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

Huaying BAO

Research and Development Center of Continuing Education,
Beijing Normal University (China)
hybao@bnu.edu.cn

Wenfeng HUANG

School of Continuing Education and Teacher Training,
Beijing Normal University (China)

Yuanxia LIU

Research and Development Center of Continuing Education,
Beijing Normal University (China)

Lan XIA

School of Continuing Education and Teacher Training,
Beijing Normal University (China)

Faxin WANG

Research and Development Center of Continuing Education,
Beijing Normal University (China)

Shuo WANG

Institute of International and Comparative Education
Beijing Normal University (China)
wangshuo@mail.bnu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

In China, the unbalanced professional competencies of K-12 school teachers in the urban and rural areas seriously influence the equitable and healthy development of basic education. To improve the overall quality of the kindergartens, primary and secondary school teachers, National Teacher Training Program (NTTP) for the teachers has been implemented by Chinese government since 2010. Among 2010 and 2014, more than 7 million K-12 school teachers were trained through NTTP, who mostly were from the midwest, rural regions, and the subject areas of short teacher supply. By the strong support and leadership of the governments, the program integrated the training resources from colleges, K-12 schools and training institutions (enterprises) effectively. In addition, NTTP significantly promoted the innovation of training patterns and the improvement of professionalism in teacher training. The comprehensive supervision polices and the combined evaluation methods of NTTP also provided good references to ensure the effectiveness and pertinence of large-scale training. The practice of NTTP has traced a leading and characteristic way of professional education, which also has the important enlightenment for the continuing development of the other specialized field in China.

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INTRODUCTION

According to statistics, the number of full-time teachers of K-12 schools in China reached 13 million in 2014 (Ministry of Education of China, 2015). The professional level of such a large contingent of teachers is the fundamental guarantee to ensure the quality of Chinese basic education. However, although the buildup of the teacher team has made great progress through teacher training and other ways in recent years, the overall quality of the teacher team has not fully met the needs of the reform and development of education in the new age.

Meanwhile, the quality of the K-12 teachers has a significant gap between in the urban and rural areas and also in the eastern and midwest provinces, because of the unbalanced regional development. In 2010, the Outline of the National Plan for Mid-to-Long Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (Outline of National Plan for Education) was promulgated and started to be implemented in China. It put forward a strategic objective, to create a high-quality professional teacher team with noble ethics, proficient skills, reasonable structure and energetic spirits (State Council of China, 2010). To improve teacher's quality and promote educational equity, the National Teacher Training Program (NTTP) for the kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers has been implemented by Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance of China since 2010.

NTTP mainly includes the four types of branch programs: the Midwest Rural Backbone Teacher Training, the Primary and Secondary School Exemplary Teacher Training, the Kindergarten Teacher Training, and the Primary and Secondary School Headmasters Training. From 2010 to 2014, the Chinese central government financed 6.4 billion RMB for NTTP. The continuous input from the central government led to the continuous growth of the provincial funds of teacher training. The provincial governments invested a total of 5.9 billion RMB during the five-year period. Through NTTP, more than 7 million teachers of K-12 schools were trained, among which the rural teachers accounted for 96.4%. It almost fully covered that of the compulsory education schools and kindergartens in central and western rural area of China [3]. The implementation of NTTP has played an important promoting, leading and exemplary role in the overall teacher training and also has caused an important social impact in China.

PRACTISE CHARACTERISTICS OF NTTP

NTTP aims to make example of leading in teachers' training, provide timely help and promote education reform; focuses on the support to the teacher training of the midwest, rural regions, and the subject area of short teacher supply. Along with the program's launching, the training mechanism and patterns have been continuously innovated and the high-quality teacher's training resources have been constructed. Such organized large-scale training practice reflects following prominent features.

Meeting the needs of basic education of China closely

According to the principle of "training for the actual requirements of teacher", NTTP put forth efforts on meeting the teachers' individual needs of professional development in both the training content and training organizing form. In the training content, the implement of the new curriculum of basic education and improvement of the teaching skills of teachers are mainly considered. Based on the Training Curriculum Standards of NTTP, the gradual training courses are designed. These courses take distinct themes and typical cases as carrier and closely combine with the real teaching situation of school education. Among all the NTTP training courses, the percentage of the practical courses is required to be more than 50%. In the training organizing form, The targeted training were carried out for the teachers, depending on their different requirements and individual characteristics, such as categories, levels, working positions, subjects as well as professional development stages.

Focusing on the training of teachers in the Midwest provinces, rural areas and shortage subject areas

Through NTTP, 6.4 million rural teachers of the Midwest areas almost had been trained during 2010 to 2014. Only in 2014, the number of rural teachers trained through NTTP exceeded 2 million, accounting for more than 96% of that of total teachers trained (Institute of Chinese Education Policy of Beijing Normal University, 2015). Through the training in the past 5 years, the overall quality of rural teachers has been promoted significantly. In addition, NTTP also focused on the teachers training of shortage subject field such as music, sports, art, preschool education and special education in the rural schools. Since a serious lack of such professional teachers,

the courses in these subject areas are often taught by the part-time and nonprofessional staffs. The slanted support of NTTP to the areas contributes to boost the professional skill and capability of teachers, and then to cultivate students' comprehensive quality. Based on the practice of NTTP, General Office of the State Council of China published the Support Plan to the Village Teachers (2015-2020) (Support Plan) in June 2015. With a series of systematic and integrated measures, the implementation of the new plan will benefit the 3.3 million village teachers from the central schools of towns and from the village schools. According to the plan, the village teachers would receive diversified training, including the education of teachers' ethics, the application of information technology in daily teaching, etc., in the 5 years (General Office of the State Council of China, 2015). The implementation of NTTP and Support Plan will effectively narrow the education gap between the urban and rural areas of China.

Innovating the teacher training patterns

In order to resolve the current problems of teacher training, including the contradiction of working and learning, the lack of continuous support for professional growth and the difficulty in putting the distance training into effect, the patterns of teacher training have been continuously innovated. The special patterns, such as combining the short-term centralized training with long-term school-based training, online training with offline training, are widely adopted in the implementation of NTTP.

Replacement of Off-the-job Training

In the implementation of this mode, executive departments of education organize the senior students in normal colleges to practice in the K-12 schools, and the teaching positions of the backbone teachers in schools can be replaced. And then these backbone teachers will receive the full-time training for a period of 4-6 months in colleges and practice in other higher quality schools. By deeply combining the centralized training in colleges and the practice of "Shadow teacher" in high-quality schools for the backbone teachers with the working practice of students from normal colleges, this training mode can offer an opportunity of long-term off-the-job training to the teachers especially in schools of rural area.

Teacher Workshop Training

In the mode, the "Seed Teacher" is cultivated by centralized face-to-face training and selected. Then the "Seed Teacher", as a host, builds the Teacher Workshop. This mode combines the centralized training for the workshop hosts with the network training for the workshop participants. The continuous training of the more teachers can be supported through this way.

Network-based and School-based Integrated Training

In the mode, the network-based training is combined with the school-based training, and the blended learning of online and offline is applied. Through the mode, the unified network-based community, including "personal network space", "workshop", "school community" and "regional community", is designed and operated. The mode is beneficial to promote the effective integration of teaching research and training, establish a good running mechanism and achieve normalization of teacher training.

Since 2015, NTTP has focused on supporting the village teachers from countryside of the midwest provinces of China. The professional training of the village teachers is carried out through various methods, such as replacement of off-the-job training, professional training to the countryside delivered directly by experts, network-based training, short-term centralized training and school-based training and so on.

ENLIGHTMENT of NTTP PRACTICE

The implementation of NTTP brings about the profound change on the organization mode, management style and patterns of teacher training in China. Some meaningful revelations of the NTTP practice are summarized.

Promotion dominantly by governments is the elementary guarantee of implementation of the training program

The teacher training of the K-12 schools possesses an attribute of quasi-public goods (Cao, 2013), so the establishment of government-led teacher training management system and the policy guarantee is needed accordingly. Outline of National Plan for Education put forward the demand: “It is needed to improve the training systems. The teacher training funds would be included in the government budget. The overall training of teachers should be implemented in five years as a cycle” [2]. In 2011, Ministry of Education of China requested that the post-training time of in-service teachers should be not less than 360 class hours accumulatively every 5 years (Ministry of Education of China, 2011). Under the background of these policies, NTTP, as a national training program financed by special funds of the central government, has been promoted dominantly by the government. The impetus role of the government is almost reflected in all the aspects: establishment of training system, selection of institutions, fund investment, organization and management, supervision and evaluation of projects. Based on this, the smooth implementation of the large-scale training program could be ensured in China.

Effective integration and sharing of excellent training resources is the important condition of the training program

Teacher training is a type of resource-dependent service. The implementation of NTTP needs adequate excellent training resources as support. In 2012, more than 100 experts, organized by Ministry of Education of China, have developed the Training Curriculum Standards of NTTP in 67 disciplines and fields. The standards have been promulgated and applied to the training program effectively. Based on that, the national training curriculum standards for compulsory education teacher are currently under developments. In addition, 90 and 33 institutions, for the exemplary centralized training and for the distance training respectively, were confirmed after the review of education experts. These institutions, with the normal universities as main body, include the comprehensive universities, the high-quality primary and secondary schools as well as the specialized organizations (enterprises) for teacher training. Until 2013, 1500 training experts had been selected to list in the specialist database of NTTP by three batches. These experts were mainly from colleges and universities, professional training institutions, K-12 schools. Among of them, there were 788 outstanding front-line teachers, accounted for more than 50% of the total. Meanwhile, the training resources database of NTTP had been established. More than 1500 excellent courses from the database were recommended as the resources for the integrated training (Executive Office of National Teacher Training Program, 2015). Through NTTP, the training resources from all the participating parties, including colleges, K-12 schools and training institutions (enterprises), are effectively integrated. With the implementation of NTTP, the more talents have been driven to participate in the research of the basic education and teachers’ professional development. Thus, the establishment of the whole teacher training system of China has been boosted.

Long-term and full-cycle supervision and evaluation to the training projects is the key factor to ensure the effectiveness and pertinence of the training program

Firstly, NTTP is supervised through the promulgation of various policies and standards. Secondly, the full-cycle process of implementation is assessed by several ways, such as Big data evaluation, network-based anonymous evaluation from the trained teachers; spot-check evaluation from experts and evaluation from the third-party. Consequently, the pertinence and effectiveness of NTTP has been promoted. From 2010 to 2014, the satisfaction ratio of trained teachers through the statistics of the network-based anonymous evaluation had raised year by year. For example, the satisfaction ratio of three types of program in 2013, the Midwest Rural Backbone Teacher

Training, the Primary and Secondary School Exemplary Teacher Training and the Kindergarten Teacher Training, reached 88.1%, 91.3% and 92.0%, respectively (Executive Office of National Teacher Training Program, 2015). As an important reference, the evaluation results are used for the decisions about financial reward and supplement, institutions selection and projects undertaking. So the mechanism of the “survival of the fittest” has been formed and the quality of training has been improved effectively. Furthermore, the design and establishment of the long-term evaluation mechanism is under active exploration and construction, although it is considered as a very difficult issue.

CONCLUSIONS

During the normalization process of teachers training of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in China, NTTP has taken effect and will continuously take effect as an important benchmark and model. Through the implementation of NTTP, both the management levels of training project and the professionalism in teacher training have been improved remarkably. Meanwhile, the efficient training system in China has been building. The practice of the special training program has traced a characteristic and leading way of professional education of the K-12 school teachers in China. The implementation of NTTP not only has a profound impact on the overall teacher training, but also has significant enlightenment and reference to the continuing professional development of other specialized fields.

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