

A Study on China's Reform of Teachers' Education: A Narrative Research About the Substituted Post Exercitation of a Junior Student

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Abstract

Substituted post exercitation is a new teachers' education model. To prove the operation effect of the new model through the practical situations is of vital significance to the curriculum reform of teachers' education in normal universities and colleges and the cultivation of teaching skills of normal university and college students. This paper adopts the narrative research method by narrating the substituted post exercitation experiences of a junior student, C, and analyzes the details of her substituted post exercitation experiences with problems pointed out. Based on the case study of Student C, this paper discusses the status quo of teachers' education in China, and comes to some referential and thought-provoking conclusions.

Key words: Substituted post exercitation; Teachers' education; Narrative research

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INTRODUCTION

The current substituted post exercitation model often means normal universities and colleges designate

excellent normal students to the relatively weak primary and middle schools to accept all-around honing to benefit normal students. In essence, it is a new teachers' education experience model supported by the "National Training Program," aiming at improving the teaching level of teachers on duty and teachers-to-be. On the one hand, teachers on duty participate in the "National Training Program," "Provincial Training Program" and other continuing education training to improve their teaching skills through the replacement model; on the other hand, the excellent normal students can get more practices and improvement. After a thorough review of the literatures about China's substituted post exercitation, the author finds that though some research findings are based on certain practices, most research is confined to the theoretical discussion, especially the hypothetic research of the institutional improvement and operation mechanism of substituted post exercitation. The empirical research in this field is insufficient. Narrative research refers to

an activity of obtaining explanatory understanding of individual behaviors and experiences through the description of individual education life, the collection and narration of individual education stories, and the deconstruction and reconstruction of education narrative materials. (Fu & Tian, 2001)

In this paper, the author adopts the narrative research method to conduct an in-depth analysis of the individual case of substituted post exercitation. To put it simply, this paper narrates a story of the relevant field from the academic research perspective. The author collects data of dozens of students with substituted post exercitation experiences. Among them, C, a junior student majoring in History of Sichuan Normal University, provides the most thorough information. Thus, the author decides to focus on Student C's substituted post exercitation experiences to discuss the problems existing in the current teachers' education.

1. CHANGES AND DIFFICULTIES: SUBSTITUTED POST EXERCITATION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT C

After the end of the substituted post exercitation, Student C summarized and reflected on her experiences at the request of the author. Though her reflection and summary are neither unique nor beautiful in language, it indeed provides lots of first-hand information about the author's research into substituted post exercitation.

On September 13, 2012, I took the bus to Guangyuan City together with other students selected for substituted post exercitation. After five hours of journey, we reached Guangyuan Municipal Education Bureau. I together with the other two students followed the subsection chief of Chaotian District Education Bureau of Zhijiang Middle School in Chaojiang District, the destination for our substituted post exercitation. As a junior student, I was glad to have the opportunity to participate in the substituted post exercitation supported by the "National Training Program." After reaching the destination, I felt more excited. However, the strenuous tasks were beyond my imagination.

The second day, I met the school leaders, and met Miss Zhang, who replaced with me. Miss Zhang was quite nice to me. She gave a brief introduction of her teaching task, namely giving history lessons to seven classes of the ninth grade and 21 classes each week; participating in the liberal arts teaching and research activities held on Friday (I took part in eight of them in total). After two days, Miss Zhang left to Sichuan Normal University to receive training, and I started my teaching practices.

The first several days, I felt a little exhausted with the teaching task. On the one hand, I never received systematic microteaching training in school, so my teaching skills were poor and my analysis of textbooks was unreasonable. On the other hand, there were too many classes for me to attend to. My individual knowledge was not rich enough. Worse still, I lost my voice after several days, because I didn't know how to protect my voice in the teaching practices. Though I took some medicine, it was a hard time for me.

However, after a week, I gradually adapted myself to the teaching intensity and working environment. I was grateful for the help of Miss Zhang and other History teachers. Before Miss Zhang left the school, she introduced me to several other History teachers. I often discussed some problems I encountered in history teaching with them. They also helped me get familiar with the surroundings. In my later substituted post exercitation, Miss Zhang showed great care to me and encouraged me. Her words comforted my tiring heart. In fact, the other teachers in the office also took care of me. They often chatted with me during spare time, which warmed my heart. At that time, I realized that the teaching life was

not that boring. Thanks to the help of all these teachers, my substituted post exercitation came to an end, and I smoothly finished my teaching task.

On September 23, 2012, I applied to Mr. Li, Dean of the school's Moral Education Department, for the substituted post exercitation of head teacher. Since Mr. Luo, head teacher of Class 13 Grade 7 (one of the two experimental classes of Grade 7), held a position in the school's Office of General Services, and he was often on business, Mr. Li thus arranged me to be the intern head teacher for Class 13 Grade 7 to assist Mr. Luo in handling classroom affairs. After becoming the intern head teacher, I had more time to communicate with students. Since Mr. Luo was often away, I gradually held class meetings for students on a regular basis, organized classroom activities and handled students' asking for leave. I also took part in some school meetings. In terms of some important instructions of the school, I would immediately communicate with Mr. Luo and helped Mr. Luo to jointly handle classroom affairs.

In the mid-term examination, Class 13 showed good performance. Nine of the Top 10 and 15 of the Top 20 were from Class 13. Of course, some failed to perform well. However, generally speaking, all students learned well while I acted as the intern head teacher. The experience also made me realize the importance of working as a head teacher. I felt happy and proud of their excellent performance.

During my substituted post exercitation period, I developed a deep friendship with the students. They were like litter sisters and brothers to me. They worked hard and carefully finished their assignment. They were a group of cute students. Time flew. It was December, and I was about to leave Zhijiang Middle School.

However, I was reluctant to say goodbye to the lovely students. I dared not tell them the exact time of when I would leave. Until the day of my parting, I told them the news. They all looked at me, but words failed me, and I went out of the classroom in a rush.

At noon on November 30, 2012, the school sent me and the other two interns to Guangyuan Municipal Education Bureau. My students gave me little gifts and saw me off. Some cried and some in tears. They parted with me, and I was greatly touched. It was my honor to win the recognition and respect of these students. The students' simplicity also struck a chord in my heart, which firmed up my determination to devote myself to the education cause. (Note: The author revised some parts.)

The above is the self-narration of Student C after the end of her substituted post exercitation. Through the self-narration, it can be seen that Student C was mainly responsible for teaching history and acting as the intern head teacher. The author further discusses with her, and deepens the understanding of her substituted post exercitation experiences from three aspects.

1.1 History Teaching: Pains and Happiness of a New Teacher

1.1.1 Strenuous Teaching Tasks

According to the statistics of the author, Student C taught seven classes history lessons, namely Class 1, Class 4, Class 5, Class 7, Class 8, Class 9 and Class 10. There were 470 students in total. Every week, Student C needed to give two lessons to each class, and 14 in total. At the same time, Student C was required to be on duty for seven evening self-study classes. Besides, Student C undertook the invigilation and paper inspection of four subjects, namely Chinese, Math, English and Physic Chemistry. Moreover, Student C was expected to participate in one liberal art teaching research activity, and she took part in eight of such activities in total during her substituted post exercitation. The activity featured “listening to classes, evaluating classes and theoretic learning.” The author describes Student C’s teaching tasks as strenuous. It is unimaginable to assign so many teaching tasks to a junior student. A question comes, “Can she adapt herself to the teaching intensity and can she ensure her teaching quality?”

1.1.2 Teaching Cases

With the above question raised, the author interviews Student C about her classroom teaching cases. During the substituted post exercitation period, Student C taught Unit 4 and Unit 8 of *World History I*, Unit 1 and Unit 2 of *World History II*. Below is Student C’s teaching schedule: a) Teach one lesson per class; b) Comment the exercises or prepare and review new lessons during the evening self-study classes; c) Finish the teaching tasks of two lessons each class and each week. The author also interviews Student C about her lesson preparation and class management.

Q: Have you ever been a teacher before? How do you adapt yourself to the strenuous lesson preparation tasks?

A: Before lesson preparation, I needed to take full consideration of students’ learning situation. Since the new curriculum reform advocates the teaching concept of “subjectivity of students and guidance of teachers,” I should pay full respect to students’ role, psychological status, age, level, learning degree, knowledge reserve and absorption. As a teacher, I need to combine the content of textbooks, subject requirements, teachers’ knowledge reserve and structure with students’ learning situation to design teaching plans with my own characteristics but also meeting the requirements of the teaching outline.

In the following part, Student C gives me two cases about her class preparation:

Case 1: Lesson 16, *Resisting Struggle of People under Colonial Rule* in *World History I* for Grade 9.

Since the lesson was easy for students to understand, Student C designed a teaching plan suitable for students of Grade 9. Students conducted independent study based on the teacher’s teaching plan. After that, the teacher

expounded on the major knowledge points of the lesson, and led students to summarize the main content of the lesson to finish the teaching task and achieve the teaching objective.

Case 2: Lesson 3, *Versailles-Washington System* in *World History II* for Grade 9

The lesson required students to understand that Versailles-Washington System is a system for the Imperialism to carve up the world after WWI. Student C, on the one hand, considered the strong theoretic nature of the less, and found it was much difficult to teach compared with the other lessons; on the other hand, Student C found that Grade 9 students had a limited knowledge of the modern world history, so it was relatively difficult for students of Grade 9 to understand the theoretic knowledge.

Through the analysis of the lesson and students’ learning situation, Student C adopted the teaching method dominated by lecturing and supplemented by students’ participation so as to help students to understand the lesson. In this way, Student C cooperated with Grade 9 students to finish the teaching task.

From the perspective of Student C’s lesson preparation, Student C could focus on three basic aspects of lesson preparation, namely textbooks, students and teaching methods. However, the above part of Student C’s teaching practices is not detailed enough. In the following part, the author interviews Student C about how she maintained the classroom discipline.

Q: You are still young. Can you manage the classroom discipline well?

A: I tried to create a harmonious and active classroom atmosphere, though I failed to do so in every class. In the future, I will explore more about how to achieve this. Of course, I often encountered some unpleasant phenomena. For example, some students dozed; some students chatted quietly with their deskmates; some naughty students brazenly violated the classroom discipline.

Student C showed me several unpleasant classroom phenomena she encountered and how she dealt with them. Student C thought that there were better ways for her to cope with these phenomena, and she is still thinking about more effective ways.

Case 1: Students dozed in class

It is quite normal for students to sleep in class, especially in afternoon classes. Generally, in the first ten minutes, few students feel sleepy, but later more and more students are listless. It is important for teachers to stop students from dozing; otherwise, more and more students will join in the queue, because dozing is “contagious.” Once, a student felt sleepy because of weariness. Then, Student C said that, “I will call the one who lowers the head the most to answer my question.” Then, many students looked up, and the dozing student also woke up. The other occasion was that a student felt sleepy during the evening self-study classes. Student C came to him and

asked him to stand up for a while. Apart from the above two methods, Student C also employed some other ways, such as having eye contact and telling interesting stories.

Case 2: Deskmates chatted quietly in class. (Class 7 Grade 9)

When Student C taught Lesson 21, "WWI" of *World History II* for students of Class 7 Grade 9, three students were talking about something irrelevant to classes. In the new lesson, since students learned "Triple Alliance," "Triple Entente" and causes of WWI, Student C said to the three students, "Are you plotting to establish a 'Triple Alliance'? If it is, then the rest of us could form 'Entente Powers' to launch a 'Classroom War.'" Many students were laughing after hearing that, and the classroom atmosphere was enlivened. The three students also stopped chatting and listened to me carefully. Of course, Student C also adopted some other methods to cope with the situation, such as warning or remind. It was quite common for Student C to encounter situations of the kind. Student C thought that it was impossible for her to handle such situations skillfully every time, so she would work harder in this aspect.

Case 3: Students brazenly violated classroom disciplines. (Class 5 Grade 9)

When Student C gave the first lesson to students of Class 5 Grade 9, some students violated classroom disciplines brazenly. The bell rang, and Student C went into the classroom. Students stood up, saying, "Good morning, teacher." Student C said, "Sit down please." The moment students sat down, a male student threw textbook to another male student, who dodged. The book fell on the ground with a loud sound. Students quietly looked at the male student who threw the book and Student C. Student C walked down from the rostrum without haste, picked up the textbook lying on the ground and gave it to the male student. (At that time, Student C didn't scold the two male students.) Then, Student C started talking about the topic of "friendship between classmates" based on her own experiences during middle school and senior high. Student C told students to cherish their friendship, not to get into a fight for some trifles and learn show tolerance and respect to each other. When the class was over, Student C asked the two naughty male students to the office and asked about what happened. The cause was that one male student offended the other by rude remarks. Student C then analyzed about the case for the male student. He thought he was not right. He apologized to me and promised that this would not happen again.

Student C said that during her substituted post exercitation, Class 9 Grade 9 made her head-scratching. On the one hand, the class had poor discipline; on the other hand, many classmates were not interested in learning history. Of course, the teaching effect was the worst in the class. As a teacher, she thought she was accountable for that, and felt the limitation of her teaching skills and professional knowledge. In the future, she

would work hard to improve herself. Practices of the kind indeed increased her wisdom and sense of responsibility as a teacher.

1.2 Head teacher: Transformation From a Child to the Leader of Children

Student C was born in the post-1990s. She is 19 years old. To the author, she is still a child. Therefore, the author is curious about how the child acted as a head teacher or "the leader of children"? With these questions, the author interviews her about her experiences as a head teacher.

1.2.1 Learning Situation

Student C was arranged to be an intern head teacher of Class 13 Grade 7. There were 66 students in the class, with 38 male students and 28 female students. The class was one of the two experimental classes among the 14 classes. All students in the class were excellent students admitted through exams. Student C summarizes the learning situation of the class as below, "Most students like study, and the learning atmosphere is dense. However, some students tend to go overboard on one or some subjects. These students pay inadequate attention to subjects they are not interested in, and even show some negative learning emotions."

1.2.2 Responsibilities

Based on the communication with Student C, the author lists Student C's tasks as an intern head teacher below:

- a) Monitor morning reading; (08:20 a.m. — 08:20 a.m.)
- b) Organize classroom meetings; (During the substituted post exercitation, Student C held several classroom meetings. For example, on November 27, 2012, she arranged a classroom meeting themed on "Show Gratitude to Parents.")

- c) Organize students to have a sweep-up.

Besides, Student C also participated in meetings for teaching and administrative staff and head teachers, assisted the formal head teacher in finishing the mid-term examination affairs, and took turns to be on duty.

During the two months or so, Student C learned the daily tasks of a head teacher, and gradually realized the importance of an excellent head teacher to the development of a classroom. The head teacher's capability and problem-solving techniques can also exert a great influence on students' growth. Therefore, to be a good head teacher is important to the creation of the favorable and harmonious classroom atmosphere. Student C said that she would learn more knowledge about how to be a good head teacher in the future, thus laying a solid foundation to fulfil the role of head teacher.

1.3 Education survey: Bravely Face the Current Education Status Quo

During the substituted post exercitation period, Student C conducted a survey in the middle school with her curiosity as an education worker. Student C's awareness of investigation is commendable, and surprises the author.

After summary, the author summarizes Student C's survey in the following three aspects.

1.3.1 Survey About the Employment of Modern Education Techniques in Zhijiang Middle School

As a new-generation teacher, Student C is very concerned about the employment of the modern education techniques. She conducted a preliminary survey of that. This reflected the emphasis of teachers of her generation on the employment of modern education techniques. In fact, the modern education techniques indeed impose an impact on the traditional teaching methods. Below are some conclusions of Student C's survey:

In the old campus of Zhijiang Middle School, there are few multi-media classrooms. After moving to the new campus area, the school established one multi-media classroom, which was the only one of its kind located in the second floor of the teaching building for Grade 9. It was learned that the school increased the purchase of multi-media teaching devices in 2013 and tried to decorate them in every classroom. Some teachers in the school have a smattering of the modern education techniques, and they do not know how to use the electronic devices to prepare their lessons. Student C suggests that the school should provide some relevant training to help some teachers learn how to use electronic devices to prepare lessons, and adapt to the modern teaching environment. By doing so, it will impose an important influence on the traditional teaching model featuring language lecturing.

1.3.2 Survey About the Morality Development Status of Students in Zhijiang Middle School

Student C thought that,

The school leaders attach great importance to the morality development of students and put students' morality development into the scope of daily management. Moral Education Department is a special department managing students' morality development. During the teaching practices, the school leaders also emphasize on the ideology and morality courses and the holding of classroom activities.

While acting as an intern head teacher, Student C conducted ideology and morality education mainly through "heart-to-heart conversion" and "group education." Student C gave emotional education to students by enhancing students' awareness of safety, passion for their life and love for their family, and motivating them to share housework at home. Based on the survey about the social morals of students in Zhijiang Middle School, Student C comes to the following conclusions:

Most students respect teachers, unite their classmates, show filial piety to their parents, love their school and win credit for their school. For example, they can clean the public area, classroom and dormitory of the school in time. In the sports event held in Yangmu Middle School, students took an active part in it, and won honors for the school. In the sports event, the school ranked No.1 in terms of group points. In school, it is common to see

students greet teachers, and make a bow to thank teachers after coming to the office to ask teachers questions. However, there are some immoral behaviors as well. For example, some students jump the queue while dining in the school canteen; some students of Grade 9 develop puppy love, which influences their study to some extent; some male students of Grade 8 and Grade 9 smoke in the dormitory or W.C. (Student C even saw a male student smoke in the W.C.); some students fight with each other after having some words with each other; some students are addicted to computer games.

1.3.3 Survey About Teaching Status of History in Zhijiang Middle School

First, Student C comes to some conclusions about the position of History among middle school subjects:

The school fails to pay adequate attention to the teaching of History. Chinese, Math and English are the major concerns of school leaders. Since some schools have the right to design graduation examination of History, some teachers teach for the sake of completing teaching tasks. They emphasize on learning by heart, thus resulting in the decline of education quality. Many students are not interested in History. All in all, History is a subject often neglected among the other basic courses for middle school students.

Second, Student C conducts an in-depth study of the qualities of teachers teaching History, and comes to the following conclusions:

Only several teachers are professionals. The rest once taught Geography, Politics and other subjects. Due to strenuous teaching tasks and cross-discipline teaching, History teachers do not have adequate energy and time to increase their professional knowledge, thus resulting in their limited professional knowledge. For example, when Student C prepared for Lesson 1, "October Revolution in Russia," in World History II, the reference book for teachers defines the "October Revolution in Russia" as a "bourgeois democratic revolution." Student C felt confused about the definition, so she went to ask several other History teachers, hoping that they could help her resolve the puzzle. However, to her disappointment, they never thought about the source of the definition, but taught according to the reference book. Of course, Student C was not satisfied with their explanation.

Third, Student C also studies about the teaching methods of History in Zhijiang Middle School, and comes to the following conclusions:

Some History teachers adopt the traditional teaching methods, such as lecturing (teachers lecture about the book knowledge, and students are not expected to interact with teachers), and outlining the key points (teachers guide students to outline the key knowledge points and students are expected to recite the knowledge points). Of course, only a few teachers still follow the traditional teaching methods, but the phenomenon still exists.

Most teachers combine the traditional teaching methods with the modern teaching methods. Not only do they emphasize on the recitation of knowledge points, but also their participation in classroom interaction, thinking and operation. Teachers are expected to guide the classroom, and students are expected to play the role of subjects. However, History teachers seldom apply group learning method and independent exploration method to their teaching practices. They would use them only when it comes to demonstration lessons or lessons for research and investigation.

2. CONCLUSIONS AND OTHER REFLECTIONS

a) Substituted post exercitation could help test the scientificity and reasonability of cultivating “compound talents good at many things and expert in one.” For a long time, China’s normal colleges and universities stress that normal students shall not only equip themselves with solid professional knowledge, but also master knowledge in terms of Education Science. Student C’s substituted post exercitation proves the reasonability of the requirement. In particular, Student C’s survey work refutes the idea that normal students have a weak awareness of scientific research to some extent, but reflects the necessity of setting up courses, such as Scientific Education Research Methods, in the teachers’ education curriculum system. However, Student C’s substituted post exercitation experiences also suggest that the persistence of some old problems, such as deviation of theoretic learning from practices in teachers’ education, deviation of professional study from career requirements and deviation of knowledge acquired from practices. Normal universities and colleges shall improve the teaching of basic education theories and focus on operability and practical skills.

b) Substituted post exercitation experiences of Student C made her grow up. The teaching tasks of History and her role as a head teacher deepened her understanding of “teaching techniques,” “classroom management” and “student-teacher relationship,” which often appear in books on Education. Such experiences also firmed up her determination to be a teacher. In other words, the

substituted post exercitation model can indeed lay a solid foundation for the cultivation of qualified and excellent teachers for normal universities and colleges. Substituted post exercitation is important to teachers’ education. Student C’s experiences is a vigorous counterattack against the idea that “many normal universities and colleges, and normal students pay inadequate attention to teaching practices.”

c) Management and evaluation are an important link to guarantee the good effect of substituted post exercitation. Management and evaluation of substituted post exercitation are conducted by the school where the interns are from and take internship, respectively. Schools for substituted post exercitation are often located in the faraway regions. These schools have poor facilities. How is about their level and mechanism in guiding teachers-to-be? Is it strenuous for a junior or senior student to fully undertake teaching tasks of the teacher to be replaced to receive training in normal universities and colleges? In terms of management and evaluation of substituted post exercitation, Student C does not give a detailed description. How do her college and the intern school manage her? What are the other evaluation criteria apart from the internship report? As an intern, Student C is not clear about these problems, and the author does not ask her about that. The enhancement of management and the formulation of corresponding management and evaluation standards and systems are an issue of great concern.

d) Other reflections: Can Student C adapt her role of a junior student suddenly to a middle school teacher? Can she undertake the strenuous teaching tasks and guarantee the teaching quality? Are there any better ways for them to adapt to the new environment and meet requirements of teaching tasks? How should the effects of substituted post exercitation be ensured? How should Student C ensure her completion of university curriculum? How should Student C improve herself after the substituted post exercitation?

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