

Part 4

Higher Education & Teacher Education and Training

Su Xu

Beginning Teachers Training System in Shanghai: How to Guarantee the Teaching Profession from the Start?

Abstract

In the last decade, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has piloted beginning teachers training system to guarantee the teaching profession from the start. This paper explores concepts and features of beginning teachers training (BTT) system, and challenges and strategies related to the design and implementation of beginning teachers training policies in Shanghai. A qualitative study to explore the challenges and strategies of beginning teachers training system is conducted. In the summary discussion, suggestions are made for policy makers and teacher educators when they try to improve design and implementation of BTT system.

Keywords: beginning teachers training, challenge, strategy, Shanghai

Introduction

Initial teacher preparation is the first step in the continuum of teacher professional development, and should be seen as a complex system that evolves according to the interactions of the various stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, teacher educators, teachers, candidates) and material artefacts involved (e.g. accreditation criteria, professional standards) (OECD, 2019). Since the 1990s, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SMEC) has begun to study and implement teachers training for primary and secondary school teachers. Since 2009, SMEC has piloted beginning teachers training (BTT) system, which provides initial teachers who graduate from normal universities or other institutions with one-year probationary training, and supports them to be qualified teachers as soon as possible (SMEC, 2014). During the probationary period, beginning teachers are equipped with professional training with unified content and standards in teachers' professional development schools (TPDS) accredited by the SMEC and local districts.

This paper explores concepts and features of BTT system that are key for policy design, and challenges and strategies related to the design and implementation of BTT policies in Shanghai. In the following sections, a review of the implementation

of initial teachers training with the concepts and features of BTT system is first given. Then the findings from a quality research into the implementation of BTT system in Shanghai are presented, in which both challenges and strategies to BTT are examined. The last section draws summary discussion with regards to the effective governance of BTT and offers future directions for policy and research.

The background and framework of BTT in Shanghai

In the process of urbanization in China, Shanghai was faced with the contradictions of the transformation of urban functions, the transfer of urban population, the inflow of migrant workers, and the lack of public service facilities. On the one hand, a large number of people in the central urban area have moved out, the source of students has shrunk, teachers have retired, and new teachers need to recruit; on the other hand, a large number of new residential areas in the suburban fringe have been newly built, and a large number of people have been imported. Many new schools have been opened, and a large number of new teachers have been recruited on an annual basis.

The career start of these new teachers is directly related to the overall level of Shanghai's teaching staff and the quality of education in the next 5-10 years. Considering the future needs of education in Shanghai, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission decided to make use of the resources of outstanding schools and teachers to train new teachers in the current region, so that they can play a leading role in developing a new generation of teachers. This is the original intention of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission that informed the launch of the beginning teachers training program.

At the same time, newly recruited teachers' practical experience is not enough to support school education and teaching practice, regardless of whether they graduated from normal universities or from non-normal universities. The practical experience courses arranged in the pre-service teacher education stage are not enough. For candidates studied in education colleges and normal universities, the educational internship is usually only about 8 weeks, and the total internship time does not exceed 12 weeks. For teachers graduated from other colleges and universities can obtain a teacher qualification certificate as long as they meet the academic qualifications and pass the written test and interview. For this kind of beginning teachers, they are not only lack of sufficient pre-service teacher education, but also lack of practical experience.

In addition, although all local districts and schools in Shanghai also had induction training for new teachers, there were certain limitations in the content, method, and management of the training. For example, the training content is separate and inconsistent; the traditional small workshop-style mentoring and apprentice pairing often stay at the level of personal experience, limited by "set and inertia", which is more arbitrary, and lack of scientificity and effectiveness. Due to the large differences in training resources and teaching strengths in different schools, and different degrees of emphasis on new teachers' induction training, the quality of induction training for first year teachers is uneven and varies greatly in different districts and schools.

In response to the above problems, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission decided to implement a standardized beginning teachers training system. The fundamental goals of BTT system are:

1. Improve the humanistic quality and moral cultivation of beginning teachers, establish professional thinking style, enhance the professional perception, and clarify career aims and responsibilities.
2. Through practical experience, mentoring, interactive communication and self-reflection, etc., to understand the basic procedures and requirements of various teaching work, to form a good teaching code of conduct, to initially master the basic skills of teaching, and to improve teaching abilities.
3. Through guidance of mentors, teaching experience, thinking and reflection, etc., to understand the content of class management, to know the basic norms of the teaching work, to have a preliminary grasp of the methods and means of class management, to be able to carry out teaching independently, and to learn skills for communication with other teachers, parents and students.
4. Through professional reading, tutor mentoring, teaching practice, etc., to understand the key elements and basic procedures of various training activities, enhance research awareness, and learn to use research methods to solve problems.

In 2012, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission enacted the main framework for beginning teachers training program on the basis of some successful experiences on teachers training, which includes 4 modules and 18 training points (SMEC, 2017).

Module 1: Professional perception and moral cultivation

1. Make a personal plan for participating in beginning teachers training, and write a personal training plan.
2. Read a book on teachers' professional career or teacher's moral cultivation, and write a reading report.
3. Complete no less than 10 essays about the teaching experience, including rules and regulations of the internship school, campus culture, lesson preparation methods, classroom teaching, teaching and research atmosphere, teacher-student relationship, student counseling, teacher etiquette, student groups, school features, etc.
4. Complete the training summary for beginning teachers, including their professional perception.

Module 2: Classroom experience and teaching practice

5. Under the guidance of mentors, study curriculum standards of the subject, and make a special speech on the interpretation of the curriculum standards in front of the teaching and research group.
6. On the basis of reading the textbooks, analyze the textbooks and design the teaching plans for the designated units, complete the analysis of the textbooks and the compilation of the lesson plans for a unit, and give teaching lectures in front of the teaching and research group.
7. Complete the conception and syllabus of an extended elective course, and teach an elective course based on their own interests and individual strengths.

8. In addition to the usual class observation, observe ten classes with purpose, and write a class observation report.
9. The mentors, the tutor team, and the relevant teacher educators will respectively check and observe formal trial teaching for three times.
10. Observe and comment on three lessons of other teachers with purpose, and write a lesson evaluation report.
11. Design a unit of student assignments and give out reasons in combination with teaching experience.
12. Design a unit test and make a quality analysis after the actual test; make corresponding remedial measures for students with problems. Complete a mid-term or final-exam class quality analysis under the guidance of the mentor, and propose teaching strategies.

Module 3: Class management and moral education experience

13. Hold a class cadre meeting, a student symposium on a certain topic, and make a home visit on a certain student's problem.
14. Under the guidance of the mentor, plan and preside over a class meeting with some theme or social activity.
15. Under the guidance of the mentor, propose one class situation analysis and two student case analysis; can make a comprehensive evaluation report for the student semester.

Module 4: Teaching research and professional development

16. Intensively read a professional book recommended by mentors, write down reading notes, and can self-study related books.
17. Actively participate in the activities of the teaching and research group, take the initiative to undertake relevant tasks, plan and preside over a lesson preparation activity under the guidance of mentors.
18. Formulate a three-year personal professional development plan under the guidance of mentors.

The above 4 modules and 18 training points are concrete tasks that the beginning teachers and tutors should complete together during the period of training. These tasks are transformed into forty training worksheets in *Beginning teachers training manual in Shanghai*, which is completed by beginning teachers during the training period.

The challenges and strategies of implementation of BTT system in Shanghai

Method

A qualitative research approach to explore the challenges and strategies for BTT is used, which collect, summarize and analyze the materials in the process of complementation. The materials include the dates from the pilot areas, the policy and implementation plan on the municipal and local district level, and reports on teachers professional develop schools, new teachers' professional stories, mentors' feeling, etc. In addition, three randomly selected beginning teachers who participated in the normalization training are collected for interviews. Based on the summary and analysis of these materials, the following topics are summarized.

How to ensure an evidence-informed beginning teachers training system

To promote the standardized beginning teachers training on such a large scale, designing BTT in an evidence-informed way is a huge challenge because it requires accommodating a range of very different timescales and organizational priorities. What strategies can address the challenge?

1. Establish a sound administrative and professional guidance system

In terms of administrative management, a two-level urban management system has been established. At the municipal level, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission established the Shanghai Teacher Professional Development Project Leading Group and its office in 2011. The office is located in the Personnel Office of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission to manage and coordinate and the standardized training of trainee teachers. At the district level, each district education bureau has established a managing group to plan and deploy local goals and strategies, accredit training schools and training bases, manage beginning teachers, and allocate funds etc.,

In terms of professional lead, Shanghai Teacher Training Center (STTC) is responsible for quality supervision at the municipal level. STTC regularly organizes expert groups to go to districts for supporting, supervising and evaluating, and holds meetings to summarize and promote success experiences timely.

At the district level, educational colleges have organized professional councils, which are specifically responsible for the regular management of beginning teacher training, including assisting the educational bureaus in reviewing the plan, selecting mentors, holding regular meetings, and so on.

2. Set up expert councils to strengthen professional lead

At the municipal level, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission organized an expert council to go to the districts to supervise BTT, and collect dates in the process of BTT. In addition, experts are required to fill in the “Feedback Form” as expert feedback and provide reference for the districts to improve their BTT programs.

At the district level, local expert councils for BTT are specially set up, which supervise the process of BTT, interview mentor teachers, assess training plans, and offers suggestions.

3. Form a daily communicating mechanism

It is very important for BTT to have a good communication mechanism between the councils, districts, and PPTS level management agencies to improve managing effectiveness. For example, Huangpu District has established a good working communicating mechanism with the PPTS schools, which regularly keeps contacts with principals to obtain first-hand information, and feedbacks problem in a timely manner.

How to develop practical skills linked to theoretical knowledge

The transition from teacher education program to real school environments is the most important stage in the process of becoming professional teachers. Even a well-organized training program cannot compensate for the real problems and experiences in the first stages of new teachers coping with. The first year of the

teacher career is a critical stage to the acquisition of new critical professional knowledge and skills. It is essential to provide beginning teachers with effective strategies for managing pupil behavior. That is to say, there is a need to guarantee a minimum threshold of practical knowledge or experience to address the immediate challenges in classroom. BTT has taken strategies to address the dividing challenge in Shanghai.

1. Certification for teachers' professional development schools

Teachers' professional development schools (TPDS) provide a solid foundation for BTT system. In order to integrate the theory and practice in teacher education, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has launched the project of "Shanghai Teachers' Professional Development School and Teaching Internship Base" in 2008, which has certificated 28 teachers' professional development schools, and assigned them corresponding responsibilities and tasks, which is the first step in the reform of the teacher education system.

BTT lasted for one year, and at least 50% of the training is in teachers' professional development schools. Therefore, TPDS is the main training institution. In 2012, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (SMEC) officially issued the "Standards of Teachers' Professional Development Schools and Beginning Teachers' Training Bases". According to this standard, 116 TPDS are certificated by SMEC, and 264 TPDS by local educational bureaus. The certification and accreditation for TPDS has effectively guaranteed the integration of practice and theory in BTT. Then SMEC issued the document "Requirements for Teachers' Professional Development Schools", which clarified the responsibilities and tasks of TPDS, including formulation of training plans, determination of training content, selection of tutor teachers, and evaluation of new teachers.

2. Mentoring system

BTT provides every beginning teacher with two mentors, which one is responsible for the teaching skill and the other is for classroom management. The quality of mentors is very important, so BTT system attracts experienced teachers with special funds and provides them with professional opportunities. BTT allocates special funds for mentor teachers in TPDS to guarantee the effective mentoring system. TPDS formulates a budget plan at the beginning of each school year, makes a final report on the use of special funds at the end of the school year, and submits it to the local education bureau.

BTT has created good conditions for the communication between mentors, including the communication and coordination in the same TPDS, the communication between different TPDS, and supervision from expert councils. Through multi-channel and multi-level communication and collaboration, it not only improves the quality of BTT, but also injects new impetus and provides opportunities for mentors.

How to resolve the conflict between teaching and training

Beginning teachers should invest at least half a year in TPDS and other local teacher training institutions, but the real situation is not so optimistic. In some schools, many beginning teachers have to take on the normal teacher workload. In addition, there are also the work of being head teachers or deputy head teachers. For

this situation, some principals have no choice but to express the helplessness of “one radish, one pit”. However, new teachers do much more than that. A beginning teacher’s schedule is more than teaching and class management, but has a lot of important activities including teacher rehearsal, speech contest, multimedia production, broadcast, classroom inspection and so on. It is normal workload for many beginning teachers in Shanghai. No matter in terms of time or energy, beginning teachers could not take part in BTT wholeheartedly. What strategies can address the challenge?

1. Improve the effectiveness of BTT

The objectives of BTT are vague. For example, beginning teachers are required to adapt to the teacher role. What roles should teachers have? Or for beginning teachers, what roles do they need to adapt to? Some objectives are empty and powerless, and cannot improve the effectiveness of BTT. The implementer need clarify the objectives of BTT and reduce unnecessary courses to reduce the workload of beginning teachers and improve the effectiveness of BTT.

2. Assign professionally matched mentors

The assignment of mentors is not two-way selection, and belongs to the assignment of TPDS or district-level authorities. When the grades and school situation are quite different, mentors cannot provide appropriate guidance. A beginning teacher has a suit mentor or not depends on his luck. TPDS themselves will also recruit certain new teachers, and these new teachers will naturally receive preferential treatment. Teachers from other schools can only rely on their luck for the assignment of mentors. Assigning the suit mentors will allow new teachers to face challenges in teaching and get appropriate professional support.

Summary discussion

In the last decade, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has piloted beginning teachers training system to guarantee the teaching profession from the start. During the implementation of BTT system, there are three main challenges including how to ensure an evidence-informed beginning teachers training system, how to resolve the conflict between teaching and training, and how to develop practical skills linked to theoretical knowledge. Strategies to address these challenges include establishing a sound administrative and professional guidance system, setting up expert councils to strengthen professional guidance, forming a daily communicating mechanism, accrediting teachers’ professional development schools, building mentoring system, improving the effectiveness of BTT, and assigning professionally matched mentors.

Conclusion and recommendations

After ten years of practice, the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission has decided to re-accredit teachers’ professional development schools in 2022, which is a huge and very important project. In order to improve the quality of BTT, a professional institution should be responsible for the accreditation and qualification of TPDS, instead of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission or district bureaus. The contradiction between new teachers’ training and workload is a big

problem that administrators have to deal with, and new teachers' workload should be restricted strictly for the first year. At the same time, TPDS should choose and reorganize the content and teaching methods carefully according to grades and subjects in order to improve its effectiveness and pertinence. High-quality curriculum resources should be integrated to share with all institutions including district educational bureau, educational colleges, teachers' professional development schools, and other stakeholders.

References

- OECD (2019): *A Flying Start: Improving Initial Teacher Preparation Systems*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2019): *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2020): *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (2014): *Beginning Teachers Training Documentary in Shanghai*. Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Publishing House.
- Shanghai Municipal Education Commission (2021): *Beginning Teachers Training Manual in Shanghai*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Su Xu, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, China