

New Developments in Teacher Education in the US  
Naruto University of Education  
July 2, 2008

I am honored to be asked to talk to you today in the place of David Imig who is unable to be here. I am able to be here because I will be a visiting professor among you for the next six months. I will be working with Professor Yumiko Ono and Professor Kensuke Chikamori, as I have in a more loosely affiliated way for the past six or seven years.

I worked with David Imig when I was Dean of the School of Education at the University of Puget Sound for about twenty years. I retired three years ago and since have worked more actively in comparative education. It is that context in which I talk to you today.

As you know one of the driving forces in both our countries is the international comparisons to which we subject ourselves in the form of TIMSS and PISA. These measures have become important in the formation of educational policy in both our countries. I would say that many of the recent developments in teacher education in the US are directly related to the performance of our schools on these tests and the increasing importance of test scores and student assessment.

You also know that education in the US is different in major ways from education in Japan. One of the most important differences is the fragmented policy in the US that results from the fact that education is largely a state matter in the US, not a national matter. Despite rhetoric from the president and presidential candidates, there is very little impact from the federal government on education. For example, in our current federal legislation of No Child Left Behind, states are free to measure student progress in ways of their own choosing. Nevertheless states are required to measure student progress and implement penalties for schools which do not make adequate progress each year with students in a range of categories. How this is done differs widely from state to state. This was well intended policy, written by national leaders who are friends of education. It was intended to see that all children, regardless of race or ability received good education.

We have a saying in English, “The devil is in the details” and this is usually true in complex policies. As you know, in the US we are fond of dividing students by ability early in their education. For example, in my own state of Washington, schools are required to make the same progress with students in all four quartiles of students, that is students achieving in the top, middle, and bottom groups of test scores. We also are required to make the same progress with students in all racial groups.

Well, I can tell you, we are not making equal progress, although some gaps are beginning to narrow. In fact, the common language is no longer, “making equal progress,” it is now, “closing the achievement gap.”

All this has had a major impact on teacher education. Probably the most important impact is that we are trying to evaluate the performance of teachers and teacher candidates by the impact they have on student learning. Teacher educators are doing this in a variety of

ways – some of these are 1) portfolios of student work showing evidence of learning, 2) pre-and post scores on in-class tests, 3) testimony from expert observers. Of course the big question is, will this teacher cause student scores to go up on standardized tests? This is hard to assess, particularly because of the short duration of student teaching and the lack of instructional authority of student teachers. In general it is very hard to measure teacher impact on student learning – students move from school to school, and even from state to state, and any significant time that elapses between teaching and testing means that many other factors appear than can influence test performance. There are calls now for bigger national databases in an attempt to begin to track some of this information.

We have many years of research into teaching now, and I would like to call to your attention *Studying Teacher Education: The Report of the AERA Panel on Research and Teacher Education*, edited by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Kenneth Zeichner. I will leave this book for your library.

Some of the results of this research that I find most important is that teachers of different races have varying degrees of success with children of different races. This leads us to another recent development in teacher education, the assessment of teacher “dispositions.” This includes what I think is the most pressing problem across all countries today, the need for teachers to be able to teach children who are not like themselves. Today we experience a movement of people around the world for economic, social or political reasons as never before. Europe is looking to the US for guidance in desegregating schools. At one point I read that of all the goods and services traded around the world, labor has the highest economic value. My grandchildren are having a hard time understanding that their grandmother is working in Japan – joining the ranks of those that travel for work! And that I am here to teach your international students compounds the social weight of the fact. No matter where in the world you teach, chances are you will have children in front of you that are a different color, speak a different language, or live with different cultural understandings. This is the biggest challenge that faces us today – and one of the most important solutions is being generated right here in Naruto with the skill and willingness of your faculty to work across national boundaries. I do not need to describe promising practices in this area from the US, you here are on the cutting edge and I congratulate you.

I leave you with a second book recommendation, *Current Issues in Teacher Education: History, Perspectives and Implications*, edited by Lassonde, Michael and Rivera-Wilson. I have flyers for the book and would humbly add that I wrote the third chapter, *Teachers Education Issues World-wide*, and I might add that I describe the work of JUSTEC and NUE.

Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to my time here with you during the coming six months. Please as you see me around the campus, introduce yourself to me. If you do not speak English, I will assault you with my very, very little, very poor Japanese!