

How Lesson Study Support School Curriculum Reforms in Japan

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Introduction

A growing body of research suggests that the contemporary situation of teacher training programs such as *lesson study* in Japan provides various opportunities for change and enriching classroom practices, for teachers' professional development and for improving school activities and learning environment.

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1.1. New Perspective

The Year 1998 was the turning point of Japanese national curriculum history. In This year **the new national curriculum** was introduced into elementary and secondary schools.

Recent research shows that conflicting explanations on the national curriculum have brought **a stressful environment** to many teachers.

Why?

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1.2. Why?

On one hand, the ministry of education has emphasized on such teaching process, that develops **thinking skills** and other **life skills & abilities**, which are strongly required towards next decades.

On the other hand, teachers feel compelled by media and policy makers to achieve more **basic and academic skills**, which are traditional symbol of school and learning.

The results of international achievement tests like PISA (OECD) and TIMSS (IEA) are **accepted as weakness** of Japanese students comparing with international scale, nevertheless their achievements were in the top level like Finland or Hong Kong.

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1.3. The New National Curriculum and The Integrated Studies (1)

The new national curriculum(1998) emphasizes **interdisciplinary and comprehensive learning** like international understanding, environmental and global learning etc. "**The period for integrated studies**" was created and added to existing subjects.

Annually, around 110 school-hours are allocated to the integrated studies for elementary school at the third grade. And more than 70 school-hours annually are allocated for lower secondary school.

To create this period, the traditional academic content has been reduced by **thirty percent**.

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1.4. The New National Curriculum and The Integrated Studies (2)

The integrated studies was designed to develop new skills and abilities, and to require students to get **will for learning and thinking independently**.

Schools were given wide **flexibility** to determine the planning whole curriculum of integrated studies. For example instructional contents at each grade.

Integrated studies lessons were to be driven by **student-generated questions** and setting its goal of encouraging pupils to think and work independently.

Because of nature of the program, textbooks were not published and teachers were advised to incorporate more **hands-on activities, problem-solving, and student-centered learning** into their courses.

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1.5. Challenges in Professionalism

Traditionally, Japanese teachers are **extremely busy** in preparing their daily work and other school duties, nevertheless they have kept **high level motivation** for teaching.

But according to several studies, recently most of Japanese teachers experience "**stress in job**", because of rapid reform in this decades.

One of the most urgent tasks facing our schools today is build up **professionalism** of teacher, which could understand children's behavior, and develop and rewrite their **student-centered school curriculum**, to struggle for new teaching strategy.

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1.6. Lesson Study and Curriculum Development

In this presentation we examine **how lesson study support school curriculum reforms** which points to the essential change in school-based teacher training in Japan.

Emphasis is placed here on **an integrated model for "revising school curriculum"** and to develop teachers professional competence like

- 1) to understand the spirit of national curriculum,
- 2) to observe and analyze pupils' thinking and behavior,
- 3) to design student-centered learning units and materials,
- 4) to engage in self-management of school curriculum, and
- 5) to change school from "institutions of teaching" to a "learning community".

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2. A Case Study of Curriculum revision through Lesson Study

Miki-Shi, Hyogo Pref.
ca. 20km from Kobe



Kuchiyokawa Elementary School in Hyogo-Prefecture

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2.1. Background information of Kuchiyokawa E.S.

- Project School of Ministry of Education for 2001-2003: Research & Development for new Curriculum
- Small-sized village school (ca.120 pupils)
- Active and high motivated teacher team
- Cooperation with attached kindergarten
- Supportive parents and community



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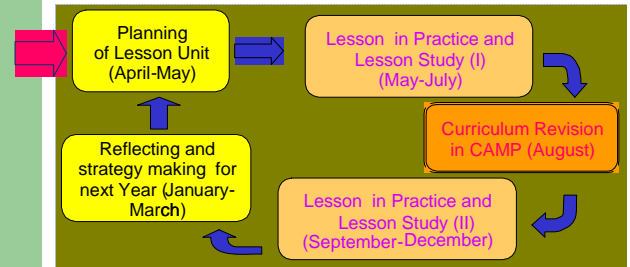
2.2. Framework of Curriculum Development

- Mission: Curriculum Development for "Integrated studies"
- Scope with 6 categories (Life & Health, Growth & Self, Safe & device of life, Coexistence with other generation and culture, Society & Citizenship, Nature & Environment)
- Sequence for 4 grades (K, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6)
- 1st Edition was established in 2002
- Curriculum is revised in every Summer



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2.3. Cycle of Curriculum Development and revision



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2.4. Process of Lesson Study

- Examination of Lesson plan before practice for shaping up aim, method, learning process
- Practice observation by colleague teachers
- Documentation with video and instant script
- Lesson Study with video reflection (fact-oriented discussion) with External Practice Adviser

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2.4.1. Lesson Plan

- Clarifying process, concept and strategy for teaching
- Compass to understand the Lesson for observers
- Contents:
Unit name, aim, goal, situation of the pupils, method, materials, Unit plan, hour plan

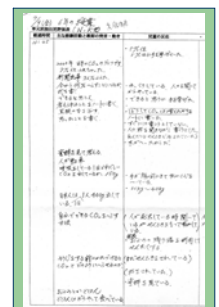


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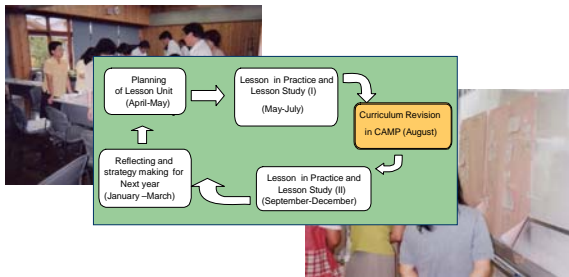
2.4.2. Instant script

- A colleague writes **all talking words** as protocol on suitable format
- Especially some "**marking child**" are elected and noticed
- Instant script will be divided to participants **before** Lesson Study in order to use as fact of practice on Lesson Study



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2.5. Curriculum Revision in Camp



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2.5.1. Curriculum-Camp

- Annual Summer Event for all teacher of KES
- Reference data for reflect are required. (lesson protocol, notes, video, photo etc.)
- **Children's behavior and thinking:** argument for revision
- Revising Curriculum through discussion



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2.5.2. Curriculum Revision: An Example

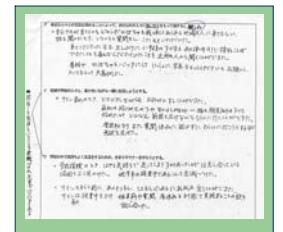
- Category 3: "**Human Relationship**" (1-2.grade)
"b) willing to keep regulations and manners in order to live comfortably in school, and c) willing to **live together** with people in community and school"
- Category 3: "**Co-existence**" (1-2.grade)
"b) willing to keep **indispensable** regulations and manners in order to live comfortably with people in community and school and willing to **help each other**"



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2.5.3. Four steps for Curriculum revising

1. Reflect practice during 1st Period
2. Write down practice reflection on worksheet (see right)
3. Compare curriculum description with practice
4. Shape a suitable sentence for the Scope



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2.5.4. Curriculum Revising: Combining Practice and Theory



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2.6. Conclusion Teaching Skills for "OUR Children"

1. Acceptance of Children :
 - Observation on activities of each child
 - Discussion on fact in classroom in Lesson Study
2. Lesson management
 - Drawing clear concept of Lesson Unit
 - Implementation of plan into one Lesson hour
 - Drawing and revising whole Curriculum

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Conclusion

The on-going professional development of teachers is a very important area which has real meaning. But most of Japanese teacher training programs are designed to emphasize only the responsibility of teachers in the classroom, teaching methods and to examine classroom management.

Since implementing the new national curriculum, Japanese teachers should be skilled in many innovative areas related to their **new responsibilities** such as developing curriculum, communicating with people, exchanging ideas etc.

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Conclusion

"I am afraid of coming integrated studies. Because we have never drawn a curriculum by ourselves without course of study."

Ten years before, a skilled teacher talked her fear in TV Program. After ten years almost of all teachers has been experienced in Lesson Study either own practice or observer.

Curriculum development and revising skills are **essential qualification** of Japanese teachers. Lesson Study is shortest way to this new requirement.

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Thank you for your attention