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Cultural Contextual Perspectives of Assessment and Pedagogy:

A follow-up study of distinctive schools

through the lens of the “School Research Theme” in the 1980s

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Abstract

Lewis (2002) remarks that if formative assessment practices, or indeed any innovative practices are to be developed and continuously improved using Lesson-Studies (LS), educators need to agree upon a shared goal for improvement, usually called a “research focus,” “research theme,” or “important aim,” and collect evidence of student learning. The process of evidence collection is at the very core of the formative assessment process and of Japanese LS. Therefore, School Research Theme (SRT) supports the matter of implementing Assessment for Learning (AfL), which might receive much attention from abroad. When the concept of “formative evaluation” emerged, behaviorism and mastery learning were in vogue. Thus, formative assessment involved drilling in relatively atomized tasks, as well as testing these against “specific observable behaviors”. By the 1990s, there were calls for a “paradigm shift” from the theory of testing to the theory of educational assessment. This marked a shift toward a more phonetic understanding of formative and summative assessment practices (Crossouard et al 2012).

By using and reconsidering the data in the 1980s of “a whole school approach”, the author extracted the meaning of “cultural activities” from three points and examined it “in a multi-layered way with multiple feedback”, to provide suggestions for 2030. The three points examined are, (1) SRT of educational thought in schools as reflecting an amalgam or fusion of change and transition, such as behaviorism, cognitivism, constructionism, and social culture in learning theory. (2) Integration of subjects’ extracurricular activities, informal/ non-formal learning supported by SRT. (3) Hidden curriculum in organization learned by “cultural constructivism”, such as inheritance of form (*Kata*) and cultural scripts.

It might be considered similar to the beginning of lesson-study that connects practice and policy that Masatarou Sawayanagi, the first president of Tohoku University, participated in to observe at an elementary school in Tokyo in 1918. The school-wide demonstration by a principal received his very high praise.

To conclude, best practices should be clarified by school-wide assessment and pedagogy at various levels (annual, term, unit, on-the-fly levels) based on Asian cultural contexts. Moreover, it

should be strengthened by school-based local Rich Task and lesson initiative, which respects individual differences and helps children find their own ways to success in life.

Keywords: Assessment for learning, informal and non-formal learning, Japanese pedagogical leadership- *Neriage*, Japanese with-it-ness- *Kizuki*, Japanese collective consciousness- *Kankei*

1 Introduction

Japanese pedagogy, lesson-study (*jugyō kenkyū*) has a long history in Japan, developing organically over a period of nearly 150 years. Teacher led research was germinated by the Fundamental Code of Education of 1872, which prepared the nation for new perspectives on education, including teaching methods and the professional development and training of teachers. It was in this energetic and productive crucible of government-sponsored international research that lesson-study was first conceived and conducted. In recent years, there has been a burgeoning consensus about lesson-study's potential to create a shared professional culture dedicated to the enhancement of learning, enrichment of classroom practices, and acquisition of pedagogical knowledge (Arani, Shibata & Matoba, 2007; Takahashi & Yoshida, 2004). It might be considered the beginning of lesson-study to connect practice and policy from the bottom, as when Masataou Sawayanagi, the former first president of Tohoku University as a president of the imperial Educational Society (*Teikoku Kyoiku Kai*) participated in, observed, then praised very highly, a demonstration lesson by principal, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, at Taisho Ordinary Elementary School in Tokyo in 1918. Japan's search for a reform period took it back to less than a decade following World War I, when "new education" was popular. Schools such as Tamagawa Gakuen, Myojo Gakuen, Nara Attached Elementary School, Seijyo Gakuen, Jiyu Gakuen, and Chiba Shihan Attached Elementary School experimented with the Winnetka system, Dalton Plan, Montessori Methods, and the teachings of John Dewey, among others. Nonetheless, this reform legacy influenced a small minority of Japan's educators, and it had limited impact on Monbusho career bureaucrats and local educational authorities (Wray 1991).

The uniqueness of the national standards for curriculum has often been hailed as a source of instructional excellence in the publicly funded schools of Japan. This uniqueness seems to me to be the cause of a rather inactive attitude toward school-based curriculum in the education community in Japan. Although we can identify exceptions among privately funded schools, I argue that the traditions of school-based curriculum did not exist among the publicly funded schools in Japan prior to World War I. Furthermore, a close look at school publications from the 1920s confirm that there was a strong tradition of school-based curriculum from the 1920s up

until the early 1940s. These schools were actively involved in the creation of learning objectives and occasionally published their curriculum. It was during the 1950s that this tradition of school-based curriculum rapidly shrank. Even among elementary schools attached to the education departments of universities, which were the places where innovative programs were attempted, the enthusiasm toward school-based curriculum waned. However, even among these attached schools, the curriculum contents were left untouched. According to a well-known curriculum scholar in Japan, the years after the 1950s were characterized by a complete void of school-based research topics. More than two decades have passed since then, but we researchers are still unable to find enough schools where the activities of the school-based approaches are in place.

A change in the atmosphere took place in the 1970s, when the emerging “systematic management of the school issues” was introduced to the school community in Japan. I suppose that it provided the schools in Japan with an effective set of management proficiencies and knowledge of how to optimize the expected outcomes from a given amount of resources. Classrooms were increasingly changing in this direction. As far as the optimization factor is concerned, it might be safe to say that the five-day school week is an obvious example. Integrated Learning is another. In fact, this was regarded as a unique form of learning, because it was to be carried out without using government-approved textbooks. In carrying out the Integrated Learning, the teachers were supposed to assess the quality of the learning by the pupils, not by the traditional paper-and-pencil tests, but by alternative assessment, which seems to have had a lot to offer. The ramifications of the systematic management were far-reaching. There was an emerging phenomenon among the schools as they were connected by computers, and the new management system accelerated the phenomenon. Information about the availability of clinical psychologists, for instance, was readily available online through improved communication technology. School counselors were chosen outside of the schools and the burden of administrative work was reduced by the newly installed network communication.

In those days, schools were under pressure to move toward being characteristic of school management and toward meeting the specific needs of the schools. Ability grouping, for instance, was made possible under the new arrangement. The professional development programs and new assessment programs were strengthened. After all, the classroom instructions were no longer in a static condition; they were more and more understood to be in the complex web of the school environment. Accordingly, the evaluation and diagnosis of the schools' effectiveness was increasingly an important issue during the 1980s. When we researchers examine the issues in education reform, it would be ill advised if we neglected past contents of the research topics in these schools, because these topics indicate what directions these schools were taking. It is, therefore, my view that the current forms of educational reform in Japan are heavily influenced

by the accumulated experiences in the areas of the school-based curriculum development.

One of the viewpoints to look at in the education reform is the school diagnosis format, which the author spent quite a long time creating. The format was designed for the directors of the research programs in each school. He or she can fill out the form item-by-item. These items usually cover all the aspects of school life. My colleagues and the authors wrote the format. We asked the school staff to fill out the same format. Finally, the outside researchers, or the people in the third-party status, would visit the schools with the same format in mind. Because he or she participated in the evaluation programs as a third party, he or she was expected to provide a third-party view on the school life of several schools in the same area. Checklists were indispensable to assure the consistency of comparisons among these schools. It sometimes happened that the analysis on the checklists contents gave us helpful information that could be utilized in other schools. An important by-product of this evaluation system was that the people who participated in the third-party status had to know what and how they were to look at the school and the school staff had to pay attention to the strengths and weaknesses of their school. The school staff then introduced a possible set of solutions to the recognized problems. As this process indicates, the diagnostic analysis that my colleagues and the author developed in the 1980s was a combination of self-evaluation and third party evaluation. A problem with this format was that there were a few items that reflected the quality and effectiveness of the classroom lessons. Although this format mentioned important stakeholders' matrix, it was not as comprehensive as to be used widely elsewhere.

A detailed look at the early years of school-based curriculum development and the diagnosis process will show how and why the education reforms in the 1980s took place and took shape.

2 SRT (School Research Theme) – A way or an enabling tool to integrate amalgams of several learning theories as a whole

2.1 Issues Awareness

Lewis (2002, p.31) remarks that if formative assessment practices, or indeed any innovative practices are to be developed and continuously improved using Lesson Studies, educators need to agree upon a shared goal for improvement, usually called a “research focus,” “research theme,” or “important aim,” and also collect evidence of student learning. The process of evidence collection is at the very core of the formative assessment process and of Japanese LS. Therefore, School Research Theme (SRT) supports the matter of implementation of AfL and quality criteria, which could receive much attention from abroad. The significance of SRT is indicated from LS of only Math education (Takahashi 2014).

School Based Research (*gakkou kenkyu*) Diagnostic Project across the country based on *gakkou kenkyu shudai* (school based research theme) for *tokusyoku aru gakkou* (distinctive schools) was undertaken in 1982-1988 by Osaka University. The contexts and research questions (what to assess, what to value in a school-based setting) are as follows:

In the 1970s-80s, various seminars sponsored by the OECD made the needs of the research programs among the newly established “research development schools” obvious. In the 1980s, the Ministry of Education and local education boards in Japan began to let schools create their own research topics based on their particular management needs. During this period, I began to design the research format that would be sent to these schools. I expected that the format would include such research items as the contents descriptions of the research, research methods, and analysis on the findings, results, problems, unexpected effects from the research activities, and requests to the local administrative organizations. I refined the format several times. Through the revision process, it became clear to me that the inner factors should be distinguished from the outside factors when looking at the research programs of a school. I began to visit the schools for interviews with as many teachers as possible. I even visited schools that were placing particular emphasis on the “free-school” type arrangements of the teaching environment. Then it became clear to me that some of the items were unnecessary, while others should be added, with a particular attention to the currently emerging educational needs of learning independently and learning through media technology.

The author tried to make sure that the process of achieving the educational goals of a school should be reflected in the checklist. Therefore, we asked a number of school boards throughout the country to recommend schools that had clearly identified the research projects, which included self-learning and individually based learning, the integrated learning, learning through the media rich environment, and mastering basic skills.

The author sent out the format to schools during September and October 1985. As a result, data was obtained from 286/437 schools (the return rate was 65%). The items in the checklists specifically asked whether the efforts were being made. I gave a written definition in the format on each category. Self-learning was defined as self-directed learning toward self-decided learning topics. Individualized learning was defined as an opportunity to learn things deeply, or an opportunity to learn with tutorial assistance by teachers. Integrated learning was defined as an opportunity to learn from locally inspired study topics and an opportunity to learn with collaboration with a school's various events programs. Learning through the media rich environment was defined as an opportunity to be introduced to a variety of media resources, such as technical facility, the print media, visual materials and others. Mastering of basic skills was defined as an opportunity to learn those basic skills in a school's entire calendar year.

My understanding on the structure of the classroom lessons is that two separate “looking points” are to be put to use. One is the classroom-oriented looking point and the other is school-oriented. By introducing this dual system of analysis, I supposed that a balanced profile of a school could be produced. In what contexts were the schools placed and how were they under the influence of the management system? These were the main questions I was trying to answer. I hope to offer some of the chief findings.

With this background, I generally revised the format with the two “looking points” as the basis. One is the resources within a school, and the other is the research topics on the educational issues that were known to be a significant feature of the schools in Japan. The checklist I made was composed of five current topics. They were, self-learning, individually based learning, learning in the media-rich environment, and the mastering of the basics. In categorizing these topics, I depended heavily on a number of research publications by the schools because I thought that these school publications might imply their areas of emphasis in the research programs. In other words, I thought that I could picture the directions of these schools through the research programs. What kinds of school problems are they facing? The categorized format, I supposed could provide the answers? Unlike the U.K. where the checklist of school evaluation programs is mainly produced from examining the combinations between syllabus and the external examinations, the ones I produced were school-based. That is to say, the checklist tried to see a school from multiple viewpoints. It is, of course, important to look at the ways the checklists were produced for other countries, but it is equally important to look at the peculiar factors and the contexts in which the schools in Japan are placed.

As the first step, I selected schools that had already clarified their research objectives. Then I pondered what roles the research topics have in their school’s entire approach to improvement? What are the suitable questions to clarify the relationship between classroom instruction and the school management styles? I referred to the OECD’s definition of the curriculum and learned that the process of achieving educational goals was an integral part of the curriculum development.

- for promoting school based curriculum development in Japanese contexts
- by focusing on school (based voluntarily-set) research themes (SRT) or topics, *gakkou kenkyu syudai* with classroom-penetrating perspectives (definitely teacher-led and lesson-study oriented)
- with the new concept of “resources” that are the key to develop curriculum
- with an absolutely inductive method based on analysis of lesson plans, lesson records reported on in-house documents/bulletins produced by schools
- based on the 284 distinctive schools’ data of school self-evaluation by checklist form containing 120 items on an interview sheet

- by way of requesting the self-checking to principal/vice principal/chief of academic affairs or teacher in charge of school-based research (*monshin*: medical examination by interview; asking a patient about his/her condition) before researcher's visiting and observing classroom/school (*syokushin*: examination by touching)

The author has continued surveys/reviews as more than 30 year follow-up study.

2.2 Analysis

As to my findings, the most conspicuous feature of the schools in Japan is that more emphasis is placed on self-learning, the integrated learning and the mastering of basic skills than on individually oriented learning and on learning through the media. Regarding the classroom-level organization and group dynamics features, there was a 32% response in the integrated learning, followed by similarly high percentages in all the other items. This is because, I suppose, the integrated learning is carried out in a flexible classroom arrangement and flexible time setting. As far as the integrated learning is concerned, a combined classroom arrangement among the same grade year was quite common. When it comes to the classroom re-arrangement at a school-wide level, there was a notable beginning in the areas of the integrated learning, individually based learning, and in the mastering of the basic skills.

Next, I will refer to assessment-oriented findings. The most striking feature was found in the self-learning arrangement. I prepared three broad categories in the area of assessment. They were (1) monitoring function by pupils, (2) peer assessment on classroom lessons, and (3) students' self-assessment. The findings showed that self-learning as a research topic was positively chosen by many schools. There was an exception to this trend; research on assessment matters in the area of learning through the media was so scarce that it was not possible to draw a meaningful conclusion. At the point of this research in the 1980s, assessment methods of learning in integrated learning and learning through the media was still inadequate. It is also worth mentioning that self-learning as a research topic was seen as a school-wide interest, as the percentage 33 shows.

The fourth point I hope to mention is the tendency in the designs of lessons. We found out that the Integrated Learning area received an outstandingly low percentage (6%), as opposed to other areas such as the Basic area (33%), Media area (26%), Individualized area (24%), and Self-Learning area (21%). Considering the fact that the team teaching was the main characteristic of the design changes, it showed higher percentages in the Individualized area (26%), Integrated Learning area (21%), and Media area (21%). In addition, considering the fact that so-called outside speakers and experts were invited to the classrooms; the "flexibility in designs" factor was clearly

shown in the percentages of the Individualized area (26%).

Regarding the teaching materials and their accessibility, we found a high awareness as shown in the Media area (26%), Individualized area (29%), and Basic area (26%), while the infrastructure-related needs of audio-visual equipment was closely related to the high percentage (26%) of Media area. It was also clear that the procurement of various teaching materials and media resources was reflected in the high percentages of Media area (40%), Individualized area (32%), Basic area (32%), and Self-Learning area (27%).

I hope to make further observations regarding the schools' intentions to choose specific items. Quite a number of schools that have an in-school professional development program (36%) said that they hope to strengthen the areas of "Basics" and Self-Learning. It is interesting to note that in the schools where the administrators provide their teaching staff ample opportunity for study time, most teachers want to deepen their understanding of how to teach fundamentally important units. In the schools where the teachers can maintain a communication network with outside speakers and experts, these schools are likely to feature an Integrated area (26%) and an Individualized area (23%), along with a Basic area (25%).

From these findings, I think I can draw insight into the way the schools are managed. When they try to put weight on the Integrated and the Media areas, while a kind of systematic framework that is not typically observed within the whole-school approaches emerged when the schools try to put weight on Individualized and Media areas together. I suppose the validity of this hypothesis is yet to be verified, but at present, it seems to indicate the existence of a delicate balance among various priorities that were approved by each school. This hypothesis may also indicate the existence of a built-in mechanism by which the schools try to harmonize priorities. For instance, "to improve the quality of teaching" is a priority. When this priority drives a school, so to speak, the curriculum-related research tends to take place. It is obvious that this priority and the curriculum are two sides of the same coin. As I mentioned before, the research items chosen by each school in the 1980s took various forms and, as I see it, there were several broad categories in which the schools in the 1980s were interested. These are, structuring of lessons (including the objectives analysis), assessment methods, schools' organizational matters (including the schools' decision-making processes regarding research programs), and the facility-related matters. In general, the schools tried to "reach out" to one of these categories mentioned above when specific needs to address curriculum matters arose. The blend of the lesson-level matters with the school-level matters were individually different.

The author tried to make a two-layer-chart. The core layer consisted of the five broad categories I mentioned above. The second layer consisted of four broad objectives that are thought to affect the categories. Unlike the classroom-level categories, the school-level objectives

were concerning each school's organizational infrastructures. Before I made this chart, I already had a similar two-layer chart. The difference was that, in the revised chart, I tried to find out the connections between the "core" categories and the surrounding objectives. By so doing, I thought I would see a school's comprehensive approach in order to address particular needs. In other words, I hoped to see "patterns" and "combinations" of these categories and objectives.

2.3 What the "Indicators" Meant

The schools' research programs often reflect any dominant ideas within the education community. These ideas are very often occurring periodically. It might be safe to say that these ideas change very rapidly and that there has been a growing tendency among the schools to combine these ideas. Let me enumerate these ideas. They are, core-curriculum, integrated teaching methods, learning from everyday life, learning process, narrowing down and structuring of contents, creativity, self-learning, and so on. Looking back to the history of the research programs and the way they were implemented, I should probably label the process as "evolutionary," that is, the schools took a piecemeal approach to school reform, building new programs on the remaining foundation of the old programs. Figuratively speaking, this evolutionary process did not take place in a straight line. On the contrary, as I see it, it was a cumulative path.

Let me examine the "Self-Learning" indicator. Self-learning seen from a historical perspective in Japan is quite old, dating back to the 1920s, when it was under labels such as self-learning with assistance and self-motivated learning. After a couple of decades, it was blended with the emerging trends of the 1950s that strongly advocated for the idea that learning should be learner-oriented. In fact, it seems to me that the idea of self-learning as an educational goal was strengthened by the encounter with the idea of independent study, thus paving the way for the ideas of self-directed learning and self-motivated learning today. If I try to find the currently used terminologies, they might be "learning motivation" and independent learning. The features of these types of learning are found in a variety of programs that were designed locally to learn locally available topics. Pupils were encouraged to use their own perspectives, to think by themselves, and to form their own views. These learning programs often put daily experiences to use. Teachers thought that the locally designed learning programs would make "self-tailored" learning possible.

Now, I will discuss each indicator one by one. First, the "Basic" as an indicator has a peculiar history in Japan. In the days when science and technology was valued highly, the idea of understanding basic facts in science was accepted. This idea was reflected in the narrowing down of teaching contents and interests in structured knowledge. In those days, the idea of

masterly learning, formative assessment, individually based learning, competency-based classroom arrangement (particularly in middle schools) was already established, and the idea of mastering the basics was blended with them. Looking back to the research literature published by the schools in those days, it is possible to find quite a number of phrases such as, “to become competent.” It seems to me that the schools that upheld the “Basic” as an indicator wanted the pupils to acquire wide-ranging skills and contents such as presentation skills and communication skills. It is also possible to find a set of finely tuned differences between the elementary schools and the middle schools as far as the “Basic” as an indicator is concerned.

Regarding the “Individually-Based” as an indicator, there were clearly defined objectives. That is, the schools that upheld this indicator were very likely to create flexible corners in a classroom, flexible courses, flexible uses of classrooms, and so on. In the 1980s, these schools tried to diversify the learning environment by using, for instance, programmed learning, intended to achieve masterly learning, computer-assisted learning, and so on. By these measures, the schools thought that each pupil’s learning process could clearly be shown. Looking back to the research literature in those days, we find a number of references to “individually-based,” “pupils can choose,” and “draw the potentials of pupils to the fullest.” I assume that the 1980s were a time when the move toward “options,” “flexibility,” and “diversification” were the underlying principles among these schools.

Regarding the “Media” as an indicator, I think there was a subtle transition from the previous audio-visual-oriented instruction to newly emerging types of media experiences, where cumulative effects from these experiences were expected. By “cumulative,” I mean to say that the media experiences that we enjoy today enhance the pupil’s awareness in information processing, problem solving, presenting, and telecommunicating, as well as acquiring the basic skills of using technology.

Regarding the Resource-Based-Learning (RBL), I notice a clear shift toward information literacy, as there were programs to learn from the satellites, the internet, and mobile phones.

It seems to me, then, that the experiences in the integrated area became the foundation of the new subject in elementary schools (learning from everyday life) and eventually into the integrated learning in the late 1980s. Similarly, the experiences in the Individualized area became the foundation of various optional programs, including the options in the integrated learning and the integration of middle school and high school education. The flexibility of classroom arrangement and time management made these changes possible. It was also the introduction of the media-related technology, such as the use of module unit that brought about these changes. In the late 1990s and in the early 2000s, the prevailing force in the education community was a so-called zest for life, which is thought to mention personality, problem-solving ability, learning

how to learn, independence, coping with stress, self-management, and so on.

The arrangement methods of these indicators may differ from school to school. I made a five-item chart. “What kind of attitudes do we want our pupils to cultivate?” was on the chart, with four surrounding items— media resources, full attention to basic learning contents, the role of integrated learning, and the management of school facilities. By making this chart, what I thought was that there must be “bridges” within a school by which the needs of the learners and those of the teachers could somewhat be “bridged.” I thought that lessons could be improved upon by this systematic arrangement of the center goal, and the four subsequent ones. When we look at the schools with the same indicator, it is often the case that each school, has its own distance from the center goal to the four goals, and that each school has its own peculiar orientation toward commonalities among them. That is, very few schools try to “specify” one particular goal among the four goals. On the contrary, most schools try to achieve a balance among the four goals, and the differences are found in the length of the programs and the methods they take to achieve their goals. This is because the contents and methods of classroom lessons might change over a course of time, and it is essential that the schools take a piecemeal approach to achieve goals they perceive important. (See Appendix)

2.4 Insights and Recommendations

It is commonly agreed that assessment practices are a part of everyday classroom instruction in Japanese schools. The lessons are closely studied within the framework of the classroom climate. Assessment practices and lesson study are routinely placed in a school’s yearly faculty development program. In general, Japanese schools try to understand pupils from a wide range of perspectives, not merely instructional outcomes, but also from personality-related ones. In other words, finding “outstanding achievement” among particular pupils is less important than treating everyone equally. Therefore, allocating specific financial resources to particular goals has been difficult. From the Ministry of Education’s perspectives, the instruction has been a top priority, while teachers have had a different set of priorities. The consensus between the central administrative organization and the teachers has not necessarily been ironclad since the late 1930s. On top of that, outside voices, such as the request for school accountability, have rarely been expressed toward the schools. With these backgrounds, it is important to note how and why so-called action-research programs were performed in the 1970s, particularly in the area of science teaching. It should be noted that the action-research programs were heavily inspired by practices in the European and American countries on school-based curriculum development.

It seems to me, then, that there has not been adequate interest among the Japanese educators in the 1980s and 1990s in the nature and characteristics of school banners, such as

what the teachers attitudes are, what the teachers want their pupils to cultivate, what types of lessons should be ideal, and how to achieve these objectives. One of the characteristics of the Japanese schools is that the reality and facts that govern the classroom should be put to organizational scrutiny. Every teacher should join the discussion to produce a sort of school consensus. Unlike the western style decision-making process where goal-oriented discussions make knowledge sharing and communication possible, the reality-oriented process in the Japanese schools takes a rather personalized accumulation of knowledge for granted. Research shows that peer learning is the most valued form of knowledge building in Japanese schools. The research lessons have provided the opportunity for teachers to show different kinds of instructional expertise to other teachers in the school as functional development programs. The only shortcoming of this typical Japanese practice is that the tacit knowledge is accumulated in the minds of the individual teacher, not in the school documents.

Things have changed. The schools in Japan are now able to develop their own original curriculums to achieve specially designed objectives and teaching contents. They need to utilize the knowledge of outside resources. They also need to produce particular kinds of knowledge in cooperation with outside organizations. Japanese schools have traditionally enjoyed a closely-knit cooperation within the school environment. This being their strength, it is sometimes difficult to introduce something new and even more difficult to challenge this “assumption.” While maintaining this strength, I suppose, the schools in Japan must take an innovative approach, or the western-style approach, toward knowledge making. Is the target-oriented approach consistent with the traditional decision-making process in Japanese schools? How do the schools in Japan address the issues of “diversity” in education in harmony with the other objective that is “quality assurance?”

There has been a growing tendency among the school administrative organizations in Japan to create a more effective form of communication between schools and parents. Parents will increasingly call for vital information from the schools. More and more parents will actively participate in the school board activities. When this emerging phenomenon becomes well established in the future, it will be necessary for the schools to provide the parents with a variety of curriculum-related information and other general interest information. Parents are not adequately familiar with assessment methods that need professional training in terms of the “variety” and “credibility” of assessment. But the schools in Japan are increasingly in need of obtaining comments and insights from parents and education researchers from outside. This kind of the third-party participation is being considered abroad, because the assessment by the third party is thought to bring about good results in terms of schools’ self-assessments. In fact, such arrangements with outside resources and organizations with clear objectives will become even

more important for middle schools and high schools in Japan. The comments and insights obtained from the outside sources will activate peer discussions among the schools. The teachers will activate peer discussions among the schools. Moreover, teachers will be able to share insights into instructional improvements and teaching skills. Although inciting the outside comments to improve the schools is new to the school community in Japan, it will be a helpful way to improve the schools if proper methods and processes are established.

At this point, we researchers need to look at the consistency found in the schools' research programs and instructional objectives. We also need to produce resource-oriented assessment methods. I have mentioned the importance of understanding a school as a whole, not merely from a single factor, but from the structural configuration of "indicators" and factors. By so doing, I believe, we will be able to understand the directions a particular school is taking. Because a school's research topics indicate what they think are important, I have examined them and made checklists based on them. I believe that the schools' research periodicals show each school's zigzagged path toward school improvements and thus, I thought a variety of experience-based ideas were available in the periodicals. I even found ideals, philosophy, and belief in addition to practical insights and intuition. I think these ideals and philosophy were behind the research topics, but the ideals and philosophy were deeply "tacit" in nature. The ideas surrounding the masterly learning, discovery learning, problem-solving, experience-related learning are too complex to be written concisely in a research publication. Similarly, the schools had intended to conduct self-assessment programs on these above-mentioned objectives and even the innovative approaches to assessment, such as portfolio assessment. Each school's research programs have been empirical, and there are ample ideas and findings that the schools can put to use to improve the curriculum. To do so, I believe the "indicator formats" are essentially important. The formats would not merely show short-term targets, but also long-term and complementary targets. I even suggest the possibility of creating a framework of assessment by which the teachers can look at the pupils' work more effectively. I also suppose that assessment practices will be reflected in the "Summary of Instruction" document. When the assessment indicators become a part of the school culture in the near future, they will be used as diagnostic indicators in various resource decisions. As preliminary steps toward this goal, organizational matters, including the possibility of third-party assessment, need to be examined not only by researchers but also by the administrative sides.

We also could undertake "historical" follow-up case study of Horikawa elementary school, Toyama city that continued lesson study with consistency from the beginning of the 20th century (1915 at latest). One of the sketch is as follows. *In 1958, pioneers in Japanese social studies such as*

Kaoru Ueda and Takayasu Shigematsu began to criticise moral education and the teaching of systemism, and consequently spear-headed the Syoshinokai (the Society for Achieving the Original Spirit of Social Studies), which entails the cultivation of proactive and independent individuals who are capable of bearing the responsibilities of a democratic society. This is embodied in the lesson studies published by Toyama City's Horikawa Elementary School in 1959, which provide valuable insight into the promotion of independent thinking among children (Yoda & Hidano 1962).

The author have noticed that teachers practiced formative assessment, especially ipsative assessment (self-referential assessment) supported by strong school culture of Horikawa elementary school from the perspective of 21st century.

3 1980s-2010s contexts

Japans education reforms had been explored in the 1980s and 1990s. The then school system dad been built to promote Japan's industrialization, and had become obsolete. The thrust of education reform over the past decade has been how to diversify schools away from uniformity and rigidity. A critical problem in Japanese high school education is lack of fit between uniform curriculum and students' heterogeneous interests and abilities. To explores policy initiatives to restructure and diversify high school education, innovative high schools with "comprehensive" programs are emerging at a time when U.S. schools are promoting national academic standards. (Strategies include: introducing new curricula, implementing innovative high schools, and increasing the autonomy of universities to improve curriculum, teaching and research (Beauchamp 1987, Shimahara 1986, 1995, 1998a, 1998b).

Those days, a zest for living (physical and intellectual ability) was proposed using the metaphor of a "bird living in the wild could be spoiled by plenty of feed." Among the more prominent facets of this "zest for living" are "a healthy body," "a well-rounded character," and a "solid academic prowess" (MEXT 2004). The actual situation was as follows: In circumstances where children were becoming ever more diversified, the ratio of student non-attendance at school increased by 1.9 times in elementary schools and 2.3 times in junior high schools from fiscal year 1993 to fiscal year 2008. The number of instances of violent acts committed at schools increased by 1.7 times in elementary schools and 1.4 times in junior high schools from fiscal year 2006 to fiscal year 2008. In addition, the number of foreign school children requiring Japanese language instruction increased by 4.6 times in elementary schools and 5.1 times in junior high schools from fiscal year 1991 to fiscal year 2008. Also, the number of students provided special support services in resource rooms due to developmental disabilities, including Learning Disabilities (LD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and autism, increased by 4.2 times in elementary schools and 11.6 times in junior high schools from fiscal year 1993 to fiscal

year 2009. This indicates that the problems do not only involve a handful of children (MEXT 2009). Looking at the rate of people who cited "lack of place / facility" as their reason for not doing sports, it more than doubled in FY 2009 compared with the rate in FY 1985. This indicates that the decrease in exercise / sports facilities that are convenient places for sports activities can have a negative effect on the amount of sports activity among the people (MEXT 2010).

4 Cultural and Contextual Perspectives of Asian culture

From the 2000s, PISA influenced Japan strongly (Ninomiya et al 2012, Ninomiya 2016, Nakayasu 2016). In general, Japan shared common values with East Asia. Here, the author would like to try to relocate Japan in East Asia from outside the eyes. With the question of "How East Asian Systems Fused Western Ideas with Their Own Traditions" (Jeynes 2006), we can focus on the Stigler et al (1999, 2016) and so on.

There is no question that East Asian nations imitated Western educational paradigms, and there is no doubt that they did so largely out of the belief that it was necessary to do so to survive in the modern world (Amano, 1990). However, it is also undeniable that the educational practices that East Asians incorporated the most are the ones that appeared most consistent with their cultural milieus.

4.1 Parent-Teacher Partnerships

First, in contemporary East Asian society, a teacher is a more highly esteemed position than in the United States and, therefore, parents tend to be submissive to the desires of the teachers (Baker, 1998; Thorgerson, 1990).

Second, the schools, for their part, are more actively supportive of family and the values taught at home, than one finds in the United States (Monroe, 1940). Japanese educators believe that it would be a betrayal of the trust that parents place in them to teach values contrary to the ones that children receive in the home (Benjamin, 1997; White, 1987).

Third, Japanese and other Asian educators regard mothers and fathers as team players rather than adversaries (Jeynes, 2005; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Educational research reveals that there is unquestionably less tension between parents and teachers in Asia than there is in the United States (Jeynes, 2007a; Shimahara, 1992; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). There are three primary reasons for this fact. First, Asians generally value traditions (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). They realize that industrialization and technological advancement sometimes challenge traditions.

Japanese teachers do not want to change traditions cherished by the family, but rather, they want to support them. This is especially true in Singapore and Japan, which experienced industrial

economic development earlier than other Asian nations. Maurice Baker (1998) notes, “One of the greatest challenges for Singapore is maintaining cultural traditions in a fast-changing technological society” (p. vii). Most Asian nations emphasize parent–teacher partnerships as one of the cornerstones of effective education (Benjamin, 1997; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

4.2 Whole-Class Teaching

Second, the American educational model of the 1870s and immediate post-World War II era had an effect in terms of its emphasis on whole-class teaching (Monroe, 1940; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Although dividing the class into small groups was a common practice in American schools both in the 1870s and immediately following World War II, whole-class instruction was the dominant practice (Chamberlin, 1961; Monroe, 1940). This orientation fit in well with most East Asian cultures because most of these nations emphasize the Confucian notion of the welfare of the community being transcendent to the good of the individual. In addition, East Asian cities were generally more densely populated than American ones, which enabled East Asians to, on average, be more comfortable learning in large gatherings than were Americans (Cho, 1989). Stevenson and Lee (1995) note that teachers use the whole-class model of instruction 95% of the time in Japan and 99% of the time in China. Stevenson and Lee note that whole-class instruction is still the most used form of instruction in American schools, although it is not as dominant as it once was, and no longer used as frequently as it is currently practiced in Asia.

4.3 An Emphasis on Effort More Than Ability

Third, the American model of the 1870s and immediate post-war period emphasized effort more than ability (Monroe, 1940). As Stevenson and Stigler (1992) point out, this emphasis has since changed. American educators and parents now tend to emphasize ability more than they do effort. This focus manifests itself in the extent to which tracking thrives in many present-day American schools (Oakes, 1996; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

*East Asian societies also emphasize the primacy of individual effort, much as Americans did previously. Many contemporary East Asians believe that Westerners place too much of an emphasis on inherent abilities, at the expense of determined effort (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Japanese and Korean education systems, in particular, are known for after-school tutorial organizations called *jukus* and *hogwans*, respectively (Sah-Myung, 1983; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Greater homework loads and longer school years also reflect the East Asian emphasis on individual effort, which is one of the cultural orientations that social scientists most frequently credit with contributing to the Japanese and Korean academic success story (Jeynes, 2005; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). However, when nations such as Japan, Korea, and China were first exposed to the*

Western emphasis on individual effort, they found it quite consistent with their cultural emphasis on personal responsibility and self-determination.

4.4 Moral Education

Fourth, East Asian countries also developed a program of moral education largely based on the American and Western model (Khan, 1997). In Japan, Murray and his colleagues helped put in place a moral educational program that taught 20 moral traits (Khan, 1997). Khan notes that although “the reality of western moral education was used . . . the actual principles were Confucian in nature” (p. 65). Once again, Japan, Korea, and other nations found the moral education in formal education easy to assimilate because moral education, be it through Confucianism or Taoism, already existed in less formal settings or among the elite in various parts of East Asia. Confucian principles were taught in these moral education school classes because East Asian educators wanted to support the values taught in the home.

In contrast, Japan, for example, is seeking to increase its emphasis on moral education, concluding that those years when teachers significantly reduced their moral instruction resulted in sudden increases in juvenile crime (Cummings, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 1997).

Therefore, with the question of “how East Asian systems fused Western ideas with their own traditions” from abroad, we could answer how Japanese education exists as a kind of re-incubation of Western ideals from inside Eastern eyes.

5 Perspectives of 2010s and afterwards

What the author has kept in mind since the 1980s is: 1) the pedagogy in the classroom should be school-wide. 2) The ultimate resource is teachers’ awareness. Since then, the author has tackled Western literature (assessment in 1982 by Open University, course book) with our indigenous/ spiritual soil in mind.

Fortunately, the author could meet the terminology of formative assessment in 2005 by OECD and published a translated version of Japanese. Since then the author has noticed some notable common features in distinctive school levels and district levels. About formative assessment, although the words formative assessment are quite unknown to teachers in Japan, like the cases of non-Anglo-Saxon Finland & Italy, teachers in Japan are very engaged, involved, and committed in schools and “sitting beside” students. School based research frequently use formative assessment tacitly down to each subject, each grade, in group or individually. Therefore, best practices should be clarified by school-wide assessment and pedagogy at various levels (annual, term, unit, and on-the-fly) based on Japanese cultural contexts. In short Assessment

for learning, informal and non-formal learning, Japanese pedagogical leadership- *Neriage*, Japanese with-it-ness- *Kizuki*, Japanese collective consciousness- *Kankei*.

Teaching and Learning

- Well prepared and coherent lessons
- Whole-class instruction
- Positive feedback from errors
- Evaluation based on group performances, not individuals
- Homework & sufficient practice
- Constructivist learning

Effective classroom management

- Purposeful, orderly and supportive environment
- Absence of an authoritarian control & encouraging pupils being responsible
- Enabling pupils to monitor their own social and academic behavior

Grouping Procedures

- Not segregating pupils based on their abilities
- Grouping along with the concept of cooperative learning
- Long-term relationship between teachers and pupils

In this paper, the author has tried to find the approach as a next stage to extract the meaning of “cultural activities.” The three points to examine could be concluded “in a multi-layered way with multiple feedback” by using and reconsidering the data in the 1980s of “a whole school approach” for offering suggestions for 2030.

(1) SRT of educational tendencies in schools as reflecting an amalgam or fusion of change and transition such as behaviorism, cognitivism, constructionism, and social culture in learning theory. There exists a lack of communication theory from Socio-cultural theory (Crossouard & Pryor 2012), especially from Japan at the moment.

(2) Integration of subjects’ extracurricular activities, informal/ non-formal learning supported by SRT. There exists SRT as an enabling tool of Community of Practices (CoP) /professional learning communities and schools as learning organizations and verifying student learning process and identity, based on collective consciousness for nurturing whole person.

(3) Hidden curriculum in “collective consciousness” organization culture learned by “cultural constructivism” such as inheritance of form (*Kata*) and cultural scripts. *People within a culture share a mental picture of what teaching is like. We call this mental picture a script. The script is, in fact, a mental version of the teaching patterns we identified ... Scripts are mental models of these patterns. We all share this cultural script.* (Stigler 1999, p.101).

According to OECD, although 21st century skills are becoming important, breadth of skills is considered as not present from Japan in spite of lots of precious so-far practices. Even from the inside eyes, Japan is transcendentalized society. For example, according to history of suffering from disaster/hazards based on having kept and appreciated twenty-four seasons traditionally, Japanese people have had a subtle and sensitive mind, which seems to influence emotional and social competencies as a part of 21st century skills for globally self-regulated learner.

It should be strengthened by school-based local Rich Task and lesson initiative, which respects individual differences and helps children find their own ways to success in life.

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Appendix

What is the school-research theme (gakkou kenkyu shudai) (2002)

Planning

Prepare main- and sub-themes of in-school research

1 How to prepare a main theme

You can select your main theme from the following four sources:

- 1) Recent educational issues
- 2) School education goals and students' actual situation
- 3) Designated educational issues
- 4) Previous research outcomes and identified issues

Any of the above sources is effective in preparing a main theme, but the problem remains that despite a selected theme being meaningful in terms of school education, unless the main theme meets each teacher's needs, some teachers might be allotted a research that does not address others' requirements or attract their interest. It is recommended that a main theme be prepared taking the realities of your school into consideration while discussing educational issues of interest with each individual teacher and communicating mutual awareness of such issues.

2 Style of writing a main theme

A main theme is crucial to in-school research. It should describe the aims of your research and the target area/field distinctly in a single sentence. Ensure expressions and words are selected judiciously.

Frequently used phrases

Aim of research: [aim for-] [in pursuit of-] [to foster/nurture-] [development of-]

Target area/field: [(research) in-] [research on-] [research concerning-] [the way (it) should be]

3 How to prepare a sub-theme

The connection between a main theme and sub-theme can be described as follows:

Main theme: "aim of research" "target area/field"

Sub-theme: method of research, steps (target area/field may be included here depending on its connection to a main theme)

Main- and sub-themes should be examined in sets meticulously so that the pursuit of a sub-theme is beneficial in accurately approaching a main theme. Note that if research stages in the sub-theme are ill defined, the content and method of the research might deviate from the main theme.

Frequently used phrases

[through-][focusing on-][through- in the (subject name)]

Examples

(Main theme) To develop children with verbal communication skills and actively involve them in presentations and performances

(Sub-theme) By using study cards and creating occasions to improve their speaking and listening skills

4 Specific ways to prepare main- and sub-themes

(1) Select a theme from recent educational issues

Along with revising the Course of Study, you may be required to handle new educational issues. For example, main themes could be prepared as follows in response to the 2000 revision. Nevertheless, it is important for teachers to communicate a comprehensive understanding of the revision's intention and content before implementation.

Thoroughly learning the fundamentals/basics

It is necessary to impart a common understanding of what each school defines as academic ability, what the target subjects' fundamentals/basics are, what perspective should be established, and how it should be embodied in each subject.

Major keywords

Fundamental/basic, cultivate solid academic ability, improve solid academic ability, facilitate solid acquirement, and ensure acquirement

Developing self-learning and self-thinking abilities

It is necessary to communicate a common understanding of how students' self-thinking and self-assessment abilities should be developed under a teaching plan and class development of the target subjects.

Major keywords

By oneself, on one's own, lively, focused, eager to, independently, abundant

Method and system of teaching to foster each student's personality

It is necessary to communicate a common understanding of the pros and cons of each style of teaching: small-class teaching, teaching by a degree of achievement, personal guidance (tutoring), and group teaching, among others.

Major keywords

Fostering the personality, customized for the individual, elicit the best in a student, foster abundant individuality

Preparing evaluation criteria and methods

It is necessary to impart a common understanding of the objectives of goal-oriented evaluation, integration of teaching and evaluation, and characteristics of evaluation methods.

Major keywords

Evaluation linked to teaching, teaching devised from evaluation, evaluation for teaching, integration of teaching and

evaluation

Examples

To facilitate the acquirement of fundamentals/basics focusing on individually targeted teaching, small-class teaching in particular

↓

Devise a teaching approach to improve the solid academic ability of each individual child

To develop students' independence, judgment, and expression

↓

Nurture students who can work independently and express themselves diversely

To explore an evaluation approach to improve teaching while developing evaluation criteria

↓

How teaching and evaluation should be conducted to elicit each student's best

However, if you select a main theme restricted to topical educational issues without taking your own school issues into consideration, your research might eventually be generic, applicable to any school, or even mundane as research for the sake of research. Please note that you should always deal with topical educational issues while considering your own school's issues.

(2) (-)

(3) Select a theme from school education goals and students' actual situation

Each school promotes educational activities under its own goals regarding "kindness," "earnestness," "determination," "independence," "perceptiveness," and the like. Thorough examination of the previous year's evaluation, particularly whether goals have been achieved or not, a focal point in teaching should naturally emerge as a main theme for the following year's research.

Examples

[Independence, creativity]

Many students earnestly executed what they were instructed to do, but failed to acquire a self-learning attitude.

↓

Devise a teaching approach to motivate students to learn proactively

[Kindness, cooperativeness]

Children often displayed self-learning attitudes, but seemed to lack a collaborative attitude towards learning with friends.



Nurture children who are eager to learn while cooperating with friends

[Determination, perseverance]

Students were eager to learn in most cases, but were easily tired (of learning) and failed to persevere at their studies.



Nurture students who can work on their studies persistently

(4) Select a theme from the designated educational issues

Schools may conduct research on the issues designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, local governments, and municipalities. Examples include frontier schools for the improvement of academic attainment, environment education, education for international understanding, health and safety education, and volunteer activities. Schools may work on the designated theme and their own theme separately however integration of the designated theme into their own theme could facilitate school-wide implementation.

It is desirable that a school is designated in response to their request to disseminate research outcomes in and out of their school, but in reality, it does not always occur. Schools are apt to be rather passive, thinking, “they have to do because they are designated to do.” It is quite difficult for all the teachers to share a common purpose, but the designated research often examine topical educational issues and thus selecting a theme from such issues and conducting a research through classroom practices is very significant.

Working on research is an excellent opportunity to influence the entire school, improving teachers’ practical instruction abilities and eventually contributing to students’ development. All teachers should diligently collaborate to realize the purpose of their research.

(5) Select a theme from previous research outcomes and identified issues

Some research outcomes might be apparent immediately while others might be observed more gradually.

Therefore, the notion that “I will continue the research next year while effectively using previous outcomes and identified issues” is important. Instead of merely thinking “the same theme will be fine” or “it will continue this year because previous research was insufficient,” you need to focus on a main theme as well as subjects, fields, and areas to be covered through meticulous analysis of previous outcomes and issues, based on a common understanding of specific solutions. It is recommended that you investigate further with the best outcomes of previous findings.

5 Select subjects, fields, and areas

School education goals should be fulfilled in all subjects. Consider whether you want to target any particular subject regarding understanding the pros and cons in each case.

In case of targeting

Pros:

Common topics could be pursued, facilitating accumulation of outcomes.

Teachers of the target subjects could assume responsibility for conducting research.

Cons:

Teachers who are uninterested in the target subjects may lose their motivation.

Teachers tend to forcefully develop children's ability in the target subjects only.

In case of non-targeting

Pros:

Each teacher can approach a theme in a subject that he/she is interested in and be motivated.

An extensive diversity of research fields could enable teachers to approach a theme in a multifaceted manner.

Cons:

It is difficult to accumulate outcomes on common topic(s), leading to a broader but shallower research.

Lack of a common understanding might result in unorganized outcomes, making it difficult to compile.

*In junior high and high schools, it is difficult to narrow a theme down to particular subjects. Therefore, it is recommended that a wider range of research fields be selected so that teachers can approach a main theme in their specific subjects. Striking a balance between themes and fields consistent with school realities is important.

6 Flow of theme setting

It may vary by school type or school size, but the general flow, as described below, could stimulate awareness of issues among teachers and enable you to select a main theme while promoting a common understanding.

1) The following review should be conducted through teacher questionnaires and year-end evaluations to prepare for theme drafting.

- Review school education goal(s) and previous priorities
- Review the reflections of previous in-school trainings
- Examine students' actual situation and review pros and cons
- Identify each teacher's desire/needs regarding in-school research
- Gather and review information regarding the latest educational trends from relevant books and newspapers

2) The person responsible for in-school research takes the lead in preparing a summary that describes the intent of all teachers and the actual situation of students.

3) A research steering committee, etc. will be convened to draft main and sub-themes in terms of teachers' intent

and students' situation.

- 4) A complete research session will be organized to propose the theme drafted by the steering committee for all the teachers to discuss.
- 5) The steering committee, etc. will modify the theme based on the discussion results.
- 6) A forum for all the teachers to discuss the modified theme will be organized to determine main- and sub-themes based on common understanding.

It is ideal to continue discussing until all the teachers agree, but excessively lengthy or frequent meetings might dissipate their motivation. The entire process can be made more efficient by thoroughly examining all matters that need to be consulted with all the teachers and those that need to be discussed at a steering committee, in addition to meticulous meeting scheduling.

All the above should be approximately organized during the previous year, not after the new academic year begins, to facilitate an efficient beginning of in-school research in the following year. It is also important that all the teachers should develop and communicate awareness such as, "I will continue to be responsible for the next year" and "I will effectively use the previous outcomes," through discussions. Some opinions are frequently heard such as, "It is no more my concern because I will be transferred," "I will remain silent because I have just moved here and don't know anything about this issue," and "This year's research does not incorporate anything from previous discussions." You should always remember that one of the driving forces that promote in-school research is communication and cooperation among teachers.

<http://www.edu-c.pref.miyagi.jp/longres/H15_A/pdf/gkgb02.pdf>