

A Study on the Nature of the Structural Factors affecting Curriculum Management in Japan

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This paper first seeks to understand the direction of the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction (Course of Study) by exploring the meaning of the newly written preamble of the official document and trying to understand how curriculum management is being positioned within it. It then explores the features and effects of lesson standards and home learning standards through its relationship with the PDCA cycle, which is an objective of the overall structure of curriculum management. Although these standards contain ambivalent opinions, they also contain positive mindsets about the potential of developing teachers' professional competence (especially with regards to allowing teachers greater freedom in designing lessons), reducing mental burden on teachers as a result of complicated lessons, and the value of (and also the possibility of realizing) the educational principles found in the policies of local governments.

In addition, this paper seeks to capture the effects on curriculum management by organizational structure, school culture, the role of leadership and mentoring, which constitute conditions for enhancing the overall structure. In particular, mentoring, from the perspective of leadership, has the potential to change teachers to adopt a more positive mindset. At the same time, it also functions to support teachers in retaining the belief that students have the potential to grow through learning.

Keywords: curriculum management, overall structure, servant leadership, mentoring/coaching

Introduction

This paper first seeks to understand the direction of the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction (Course of Study) which will come into effect fully in the 2020 academic year by exploring the meaning of the newly written preamble of the official document. It also attempts to capture the characteristics of the framework described under the section on General Principles. Next, it seeks to clarify how curriculum management is positioned in the new set of guidelines, and discusses possible ways to approach the organization and implementation of the educational curriculum.

Secondly, this paper will explore the various factors affecting the overall structure of curriculum management. It will also consider the PDCA cycle, which is stipulated as an objective of the curriculum, and how it is related to “lesson standards” or “home-learning standards” which many local governments have adopted and introduced. The features, effects, and noteworthy points of these standards will be explored through case studies on Fukushima and Kochi prefectures.

Finally, this paper will also seek to clarify the effects that organizational structure within the overall structure, school culture, leadership roles and mentoring have on curriculum management.

1. Direction of the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction and Curriculum Management

- (1) What is the meaning behind the preamble of the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction?

Unlike previous versions, the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction document come with a preamble. This preamble lays down as a goal of education the achievement of Articles 1 (Aims) and 2 (Objectives) of the Basic Act on Education, and also lays emphasis on an “educational curriculum that is open to society.”

The preamble includes the term “educational curriculum that is open to society,” which refers to “sharing with society” the objectives of the educational curriculum. Specifically, this refers to: (1) Seeking to create a better society through a better school education, and to share this objective with the wider society through the education process; (2) Delineating clearly what qualities and competencies are needed in the curriculum for students to engage with society and the world and to carve out a life on their own, in order to develop these qualities and competencies in students; (3) Achieving school education that is not confined within schools but instead works hand-in-hand with social education and capitalizes on human resources and other resources in the region in implementing the curriculum, thereby sharing the outcomes of such an education with the rest of society.

- (2) Learning Map shown in the framework in the first chapter, General Principles

The items which appeared under the General Principles section of the 2008 version of the Guidelines of Learning and Instruction are listed below, and, as shown below, their nature as points of policy has been emphasized.

1. General policy for the educational curriculum

- 2. Common points on how to approach the content of the curriculum**
- 3. Approaches to lesson hours**
- 4. Points to take into consideration when making lesson plans, etc.**

In the new version of the Guidelines of Learning and Instruction, these items have been changed to the following. They attempt to delineate clearly the qualities and competencies which are essential in the contemporary society and how these are to be inculcated in students through education activities in school, and appear more like a “learning map” which assumes the features of curriculum management which will be discussed subsequently.

- 1. Fundamentals of education in elementary and junior high schools and the role of the educational curriculum**
- 2. Structure of the educational curriculum**
- 3. Implementation of the educational curriculum and learning assessment**
- 4. Supporting the development of students**
- 5. Points to note regarding school operation**
- 6. Points regarding moral education**

In this section, I would like to focus on the main perspectives of the first item in the above list (Fundamentals of education in elementary and junior high schools and the role of the educational curriculum).

(1) Realization of “deep learning based on self-initiative and mutual dialogue”

In the official document, Clause 2 of Item 1 says that “when implementing education activities in schools, each school should develop education activities which are unique and creative, seeking to improve its lessons through the realization of deep learning which is based on the students’ self-initiative and mutual dialogue. Through this, schools can aim to achieve objectives (1) to (3) written below, and develop in students the ability to live and thrive in our society.”

Instead of merely referring to an abstract concept of “the ability to live and thrive in our society” as in the previous versions of the document, the new document spells out specifically how to inculcate this ability in students. This is done through “deep learning which is based on the students’ self-initiative and mutual dialogue.” Regarding this, firstly, “learning based on self-initiative” can be understood as a kind of learning where the student is interested in what they are learning, making connections between what they are learning and their own career trajectory, having a long-term view in mind as they engage in the learning process with persistence, reflecting on their own learning activities and relating them to subsequent learning. Secondly, “learning based on mutual dialogue” is one where the students broaden their own thinking through collaborating with one another, engaging in dialogue with teachers or other individuals in the community, and drawing inspiration from others in their thinking. Thirdly, “deep thinking” can be seen as a way of thinking involving deep comprehension through making connections between different sets of knowledge, forming one’s views after

a thorough examination of existing information, identifying problems and coming up with solutions, and creating meaning and value based on ideas and opinions. All this is achieved with the support of the knowledge and skills acquired in the different school subjects, and through making use of the various ways to see and think about issues which students have learned about in school.

In order to realize this kind of “deep learning based on self-initiative and mutual dialogue,” schools are expected to improve and enhance their lessons through the perspective of active learning.

(2) Three pillars of “qualities and competencies to develop in students”

Clause 3 of item 1 was first unveiled in the Report by the Central Council of Education (21 Dec, 2016) entitled: Improvements in the Guidelines for Learning and Instruction and Necessary Measures (Kindergartens, Elementary Schools, Junior High, Senior High and Special Assistance Schools). It refers to the three pillars of “qualities and competencies to develop in students,” which were stipulated as:

- (1) **Ensuring that students acquire knowledge and skills**
- (2) **Developing the ability to think, evaluate and express one’s ideas**
- (3) **Inculcating the ability to engage with learning, alongside a sense of human values, etc.**

As Figure 1 shows, the new Guidelines of Learning and Instruction go deeper into the three components (knowledge/skills; ability to think/evaluate/express one’s ideas; independent learning) laid down by the School Education Act, Article 30 paragraph 2. It can be understood as an attempt to delineate the inter-related mechanisms between them by organizing them into three pillars.

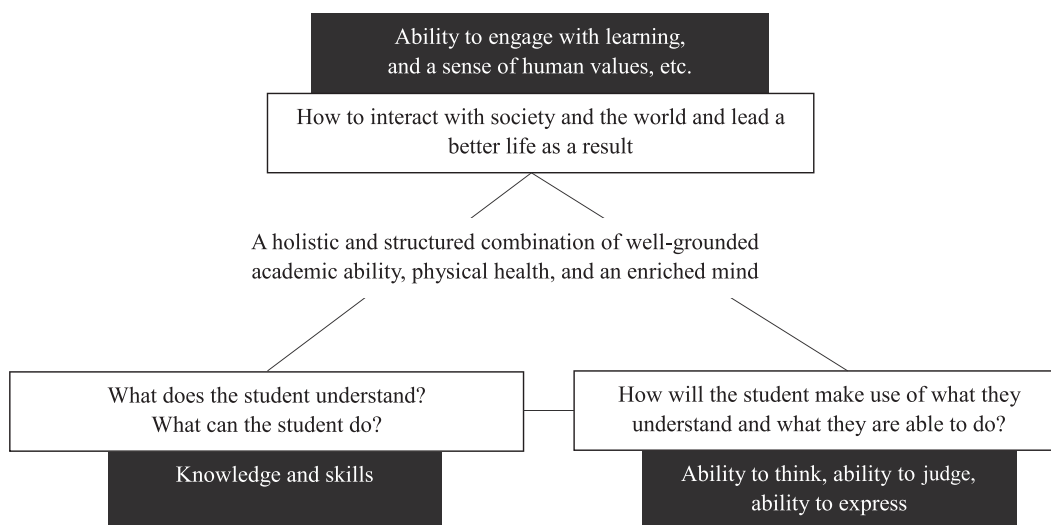


Figure 1: The three pillars in terms of the qualities and abilities which the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction (Course of Study) seek to inculcate

(3) Three facets of Curriculum Management

1. Clause 4 of Item 1 (Fundamentals of education in elementary and junior high schools and the role of the educational curriculum) mentioned earlier stipulates that “each school should aim to enhance the quality of its educational activities at the organizational and systemic level based on the educational curriculum” (referred to as “curriculum management” henceforth). Moreover, the notion of curriculum management is also mentioned in a section about its relationship with school assessment under Item 5 “Points to note regarding school operation.”

In the Report by the Central Council of Education (21 Dec 2016), the concept of curriculum management was interpreted from the following three facets. We can see that each facet corresponds to Clause 4, Item 1 of the General Principles section (remarks in the square brackets are made by the author).

- 1) Understanding the inter-relationships between the curriculum content of the various subjects through the perspective of subjects inter-disciplinarity based on the objectives of school education, and then arranging and organizing the education content in a systematic manner in order to achieve these objectives. [Curriculum design]
- 2) Establishing a series of PDCA cycles which seeks to improve the quality of lessons through design, implementation, and assessment, based on surveys and various data relating to students and circumstances in the community in order to enhance the quality of education content. [Establishing PDCA cycles]
- 3) Effectively combining both internal and external resources by making ample use of human resources and other resources necessary for educational content and activities, including those external to the region. [Capitalizing on internal and external resources]

(4) Curriculum Design

The term “curriculum design” in the preceding section can be understood at three levels: a) capturing the grand design which underpins the curriculum based on the educational objectives (overall design); b) having an overview of all the lesson units and making a lesson unit distribution plan; and c) writing a lesson plan which emphasizes the contexts of learning. Going through these three levels can lead to a specific lesson design.¹

The grand design in a) requires creating educational objectives and focus objectives based on an analysis of the current situation, and it is crucial to draw out analytically the specific qualities and competencies which are to be developed in students. Figure 2 is provided as an example of the possible procedures and content when thinking about the grand design of a curriculum.²

Regarding the creation of a lesson unit distribution plan in b), the existing practice had previously been to merely create a scheme of work for each subject independently. However, it has now become an expectation to adopt a perspective which cuts across all subjects when creating and implementing an educational curriculum. Generally speaking, the scheme of work shows the instructional plan of each subject for the year by arranging lesson units according to a time axis broken down into months or school terms. A lesson units distribution

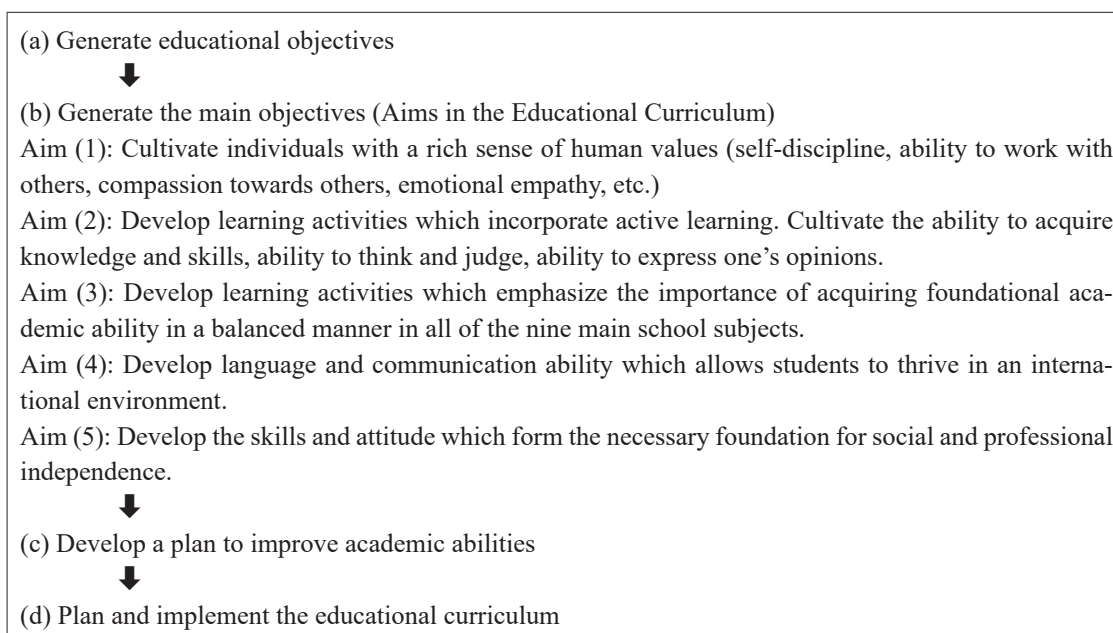


Figure 2: Example of a Grand Design for the Curriculum

plan is a table which integrates the scheme of work of each subject into a format which allows the visualization of how the lesson units are distributed throughout the year for every single subject.

However, there are some points to note when it comes to creating a yearly instructional plan. In addition to having a good understanding beforehand of the students' learning experiences and the qualities and competencies which they have already acquired, there is a need to refer to the textbooks while considering the sequential order by which the lessons are implemented, the appropriateness of the timing for each lesson, whether excess or inadequate time is allocated to each lesson, and creating a plan which has operational flexibility. Moreover, when making a lesson unit distribution plan, it is expected that educators will arrange the lessons based on the "qualities and competencies to be developed in students" as shown in Figure 1. In other words, when it comes to (c), there is a need to consider how the qualities and competencies to be developed in each subject relate to one another when planning and sequencing each unit.

In particular, it is crucial to consider the inter-relationship between the two subjects of Integrated Studies and Life Environment Studies and the other subjects in order to make the most out of the synergistic effects in the educational curriculum. This will allow for new connections to be made between the knowledge and skills acquired in different subjects, facilitating the acquisition and reinforcement of these knowledge and skills. The learning successes experienced in Life Environment Studies and Integrated Studies will also result in higher motivation in the other subjects, and help students to gain an understanding of real-life situations.

Under the Explanatory Notes (General Principles) for the Guidelines of Learning and Instruction for elementary schools, the following description is given regarding the creation and implementation of an educational curriculum that emphasizes a perspective which cuts

across all subjects:

Each school should select the educational content that is necessary to achieve the aims and objectives of education, and come up with an instructional plan that considers the mutual relationships between each subject. It is expected that schools will decide on the hours to be allocated to each subject per year (and also per term, per month and per week) in an appropriate manner while taking into account how to effectively integrate educational content into students' lives.

Regarding the underlined portion, consider the example of how seven public elementary schools in the Meguro district of Tokyo implement a timetable of 40-minute lessons spread among 5 hours in the morning. In this example, the hours in the morning where students find it easier to concentrate were designated as “learning hours.” Meanwhile, the afternoon hours where students are likely to feel tired or sleepy are designated as “activity hours,” and activity-based lessons like physical education, science experiments, arts and crafts, and discussions are carried out. This is a new perspective from which the school attempts to achieve deep learning that is self-initiated and dialogue-based.

The remaining two out of the three facets of curriculum management, namely, the establishment of the PDCA cycle and the capitalization of internal and external resources will be discussed in a later section. However, it is important to point out here that they are both related to the content found in the Explanatory Notes (General Principles) for the Guidelines of Learning and Instruction. The former can be discussed in relation to “the importance of implementation based on school assessment,” while the latter is described as “the importance of not merely ensuring access to human systems and material systems but also seeking to enhance them.” It is important for the school and education board to have a common understanding about how the three facets of curriculum management can play a part in improving the school system (school improvement).

2. Structure of curriculum management and Lesson Standards/Home-Learning Standards

(1) Overall structure of curriculum management

The fundamental structure of curriculum management can be understood in terms of three aspects. The first is to research and analyze from a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analytical perspective the school's internal environmental factors (human and network resources (humanware), physical and financial resources (hardware) and information resources (software)) and external environmental factors (guardians, residents in the community, education boards, social welfare councils, NPOs, etc.) based on the school's mission and the objectives of school education. This analysis can help to distill the issues surrounding the educational activities, curriculum, or vision of the school with the help of the Guidelines for Learning and Instruction or the education guidelines of the education committee, and specific short-(one year) and middle-term (three years) objectives or school management plans can be drawn up accordingly.

The second aspect is the management cycle when it comes to managing the objectives and content of the curriculum. Planning (which corresponds to “Plan” in the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Action) cycle) of the educational curriculum should take into account the realities which students are facing, and the opinions and needs of guardians and those living in the community. There is also a need to prioritize the practical effectiveness of the plan. During the implementation of the curriculum (“Do” in the the PDCA cycle), it is crucial to adopt a stance where information is disseminated and transmitted, ensuring positive, bi-directional communication channels between schools and guardians or those living in the community where the everyday activities of the school are conducted, in an open and transparent manner. As for the “Check” stage of the PDCA cycle, which corresponds to the evaluation of the curriculum, it would be desirable if schools conduct self-initiated assessment of themselves based on the voices of external stakeholders and third parties. There is a need for schools to work as a team to understand the issues which need to be addressed and to reflect the opinions of supporting institutions and individuals, such as school advisors and school operation committees (community school). This should be undertaken while gaining a wholistic understanding of the objectives levels to be attained. For the most important “Action” stage of the

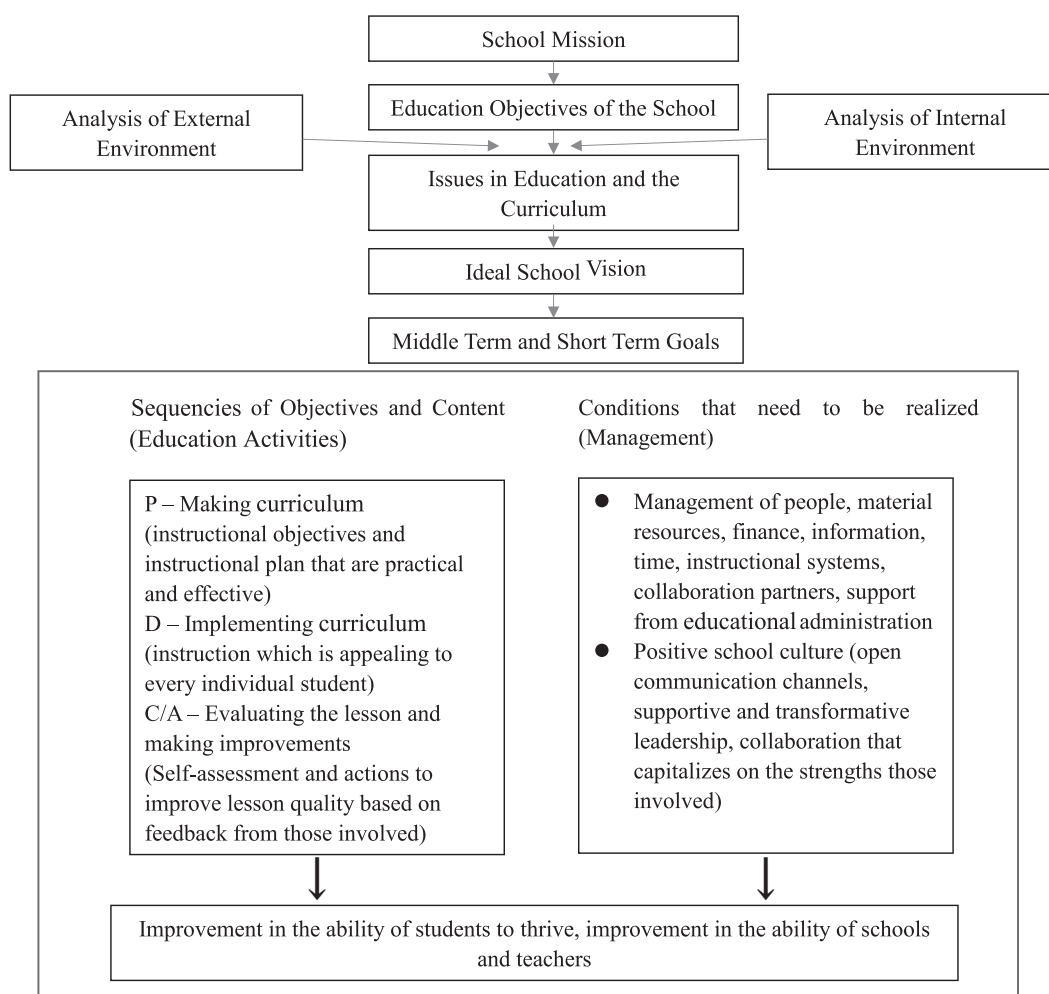


Figure 3. Overall Structure of Curriculum Management

cycle, it is crucial to reveal the findings and results to the teaching staff and other stakeholders, implementing specific and positive messaging about the way forward, while also drawing attention to the challenges the school is encountering.

The third aspect, which is the management of the necessary conditions, is extremely important in determining whether the first two aspects can be activated. Specifically, this refers to the management of people, material resources, finance, information, time, instruction systems, collaboration with external parties, and administration regarding the education curriculum, alongside the formation of a positive school culture (open and honest communication channels, supportive and transformative leadership, meaningful collaboration which capitalizes on each party's strengths).

Each of these aspects ultimately greater enables young people to thrive, as well as enhancing the capacity of schools and teachers (see Figure 3).³

(2) Making use of lesson standards in the PDCA cycle

Here, I will explore how “lesson standards” and “home learning standards” can be used in the context of the PDCA cycle of a lesson.

From 2015 onwards in particular, many local governments have started to compile and create what are called “lesson standards,” which are essentially lesson guides that provide explanatory notes about the instructional content and teaching methods. In the 2018 academic year, this trend can be observed in 30 out of 47 prefectures. The background to this lies in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) commissioning a project to investigate the level of academic abilities and the situation in terms of education more generally at a nationwide level, the results of which were used to improve the quality of lessons and teaching. Moreover, the increase in the number of young teachers especially in urban areas also means that the development of teaching ability in the teaching workforce became an issue⁴. The number of teachers retiring the profession reached a peak in public elementary schools in the 2016 academic year, whereas for public junior high schools the peak was reached in the 2018 academic year.

(1) Kochi Prefecture (Standards for lesson planning)

In the 2008 academic year, the education board of Kochi Prefecture was the first in the country to create a set of “standards for lesson planning” which “presents teaching pointers which can be used in all subjects, clearly stipulating the skills which are to be inculcated in students, so as to create lessons where students can achieve self-directed learning.” These standards are categorized into three stages - before the lesson, during the lesson, and after the end of a lesson or unit. They highlight the importance of referring to the yearly instruction plan and the unit instruction plan when devising lessons instead of only planning lessons as individual lesson units. They also emphasize the need for clear evaluation of the skills which are to be inculcated in the students, and the importance of reviewing the yearly instruction plan if the need arises.⁵

In the 2014 academic year, the Kochi education board published the Basic Guidebook for Lesson Planning - Basics and Foundations for Young Teachers (Elementary and Junior High),

based on the earlier standards for lesson planning. This was further developed into the Kochi Prefecture Basic Guidebook for Lesson Planning in the 2015 academic year, which was created with all teaching staff in mind. Moreover, after the New Guidelines for Learning and Instruction (Course of Study) were released in March 2017 and the concept of “deep learning based on self-initiative and mutual dialogue” was implemented as a way to improve the quality of lessons, a revised edition of this guidebook was made which included the principles of the new set of guidelines in order to work towards enhancing lesson quality.

The revised edition of Kochi Prefecture Basic Guidebook for Lesson Planning includes a section on Lesson Planning based on Universal Design as a part of the foundations or basics for planning lessons which result in deep learning based on self-initiative and mutual dialogue. Universal design here refers to “a design which is convenient and easy for everyone regardless of age, gender, and whether the user has any disabilities.” In other words, it is a perspective which seeks to improve lessons by taking into account how to make something understandable and doable for all students (see Figure 4).⁶

I	Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Present learning objectives in a way which is easy to understand
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Consciously remove objects in the front of the classroom to reduce distractions
II	Information Dissemination	<input type="checkbox"/>	Write information on the board in a clear and logical sequence
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Structure the way you write on the board to make points clearer
III	Activity Content	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visually present the flow of the lesson
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Incorporate pair-work and groupwork, etc., so that a space is created where students can interact, learn and teach one another
IV	Teaching Resources/ Teaching Aids	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make use of hint cards, etc. suited to the problem-solving learning process
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Use timers, etc. to make it easier to keep track of time
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Make use of ICT
V	Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare the activity in such a way that students can check their own work
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Consider the timing when are giving both positive feedback so that students can make connections between the feedback and their behavior. For example, provide feedback directly after a particular behavior.

Figure 4: Perspective in terms of Universal Design

Incidentally, opinions of a more ambivalent nature can also be found within the pages of the lesson standards, such as those which criticize the standardization and homogenization of teaching content and methods, the practical complications in addressing the needs of diverse students, the weakening of teachers’ foundations in specialized knowledge, and worries regarding the normalization of home education. Nonetheless, there are also those of a more positive nature, such as the potential to develop a pool of specialized teachers, the possibil-

ity of reducing the mental burden placed on teachers when they are expected to implement complicated lessons, and the possibility of realizing the educational principles and values set down in education policies of local governments⁷. Based on the fact that the lesson standards of both Kochi Prefecture and Fukushima Prefecture (discussed subsequently) are designed with the intention for flexible use, I can infer that teachers and school organizations are still given the space for individual customization when designing their lessons.

(2) Fukushima Prefecture: “Lesson Standards for Fukushima”

The Lesson Standards of Fukushima, compiled by the Fukushima Prefecture Education Board in April 2017, examine the revisions made to the Guidelines for Learning and Instruction and provide pointers regarding popular teaching methods and common difficulties encountered in the classroom. Lessons are perceived as “irreplaceably crucial time for students” and the things which a teacher should do as part of the lesson process (categorized into before the lesson, movement towards the classroom, and after the lesson) are presented under headings such as “desirable human relationships,” “teacher attitude,” and “educational discipline,” which are considered to be the “foundations of a lesson.” It also emphasizes the need for teachers to learn from one another on a daily basis in order to improve these aspects. When it comes to lesson implementation, useful points at each stage of a lesson (introduction, development, and conclusion) are presented, including information about what the teacher can say or do to stimulate students, ways to enhance the quality of the lessons, and specific tips for teaching techniques (writing on the board, guiding students at their tables, questioning, teaching using notes, etc.).⁸

These lesson standards were created on the premise that teachers would make use of the standards while keeping in mind the problems or issues at hand which needed to be tackled, alongside using the lesson standards when planning and reflecting on the conduct of their lessons with their colleagues.

Under the “learning standards checklist,” teachers are encouraged to devise their lessons individually and “decide your own key points,” “use them as a perspective during lesson visits,” and “add on your own new items” when making use of the lesson standard. From this, we can see that teachers are encouraged to be flexible about the use of these tools and respond to the uncertainties of actual education practice.

In terms of actual practice, the Promotion of Learning Standards (Second Year) is an initiative of AY 2018 that seeks to enhance the use of the lesson standards in Fukushima schools. It contains the following to report regarding case studies of public elementary and junior high schools in Kitakata city⁹:

- **Discussions about how to make use of the lesson standards, stipulated as research themes and organized at the subject department level, have become invaluable opportunities to learn about teaching methods. The growth in teaching ability is especially pronounced in younger teachers, and they were able to ensure sufficient time to sum up the lesson.**
- **Through lessons which are designed based on the lesson standards, students’ inter-**

est level in the teaching material has increased. Moreover, more students have the opportunity to encounter new learning in their daily lives outside the classroom (including learning at home).

- **Through the use of the lesson standards, teachers have become more mindful of the need to create opportunities for students to speak instead of conducting lessons which are centered around the teacher.**
- **Through the use of the checklist, and through improving lessons from the perspectives listed in the lesson standards, it has become possible to emphasize the key points of the teaching content on a daily basis.**
- **In the use of the lesson standards, we hope to increase the awareness of students' learning styles instead of only focusing on the teacher.**

(3) Home learning standards and the R-PDCA Cycle

In addition to lesson standards, local governments are also producing home learning standards as part of the grand design to improve academic standards overall. Fukushima Prefecture has also created a set of Home Learning Standards for Fukushima, and there were two backgrounds which contributed to this. Firstly, the results of the national survey on academic learning reveal that the percentage of Fukushima students who dedicated more than 1 hour on weekdays and more than 2 hours on weekends to study. While this is above the national average, it did not necessarily translate into higher average academic scores in the various subjects. Secondly, schools are now expected to develop in students “an ability to engage with learning, alongside a sense of human values” as one of the qualities and skills listed in the new Guidelines for Learning and Instruction, and they have to consider how to ensure students are acquiring good learning habits while coordinating with their family members.

A feature of the Home Learning Standards for Fukushima is the clear emphasis on the importance of self-management, or “the ability to improve one’s learning and lifestyle through the R-PDCA cycle.” R-PDCA adds “Research” to the PDCA cycle mentioned above. Self-management is positioned as the driving force which propels students to study in a self-directed and self-disciplined manner at home. From the point of view of developing this self-management ability in students, topics including “what we want our children to become,, “school policies,” “connections with students’ family members and people living in the community” were explained as follows.¹⁰

Under “what we want our children to become,” the four items of “when to learn,” “what to learn,” “how to learn,” and “lifestyle” are highlighted, and students are expected to seek self-improvement through self-management using the R-PDCA cycle. In other words, the students will repeat the cycle of “Research” (conducting research to objectively understand the issue at hand), “Plan” (setting up goals and a plan depending on the issue at hand), “Do” (learning in a self-directed manner based on the plan), “Check” (checking and reflecting on the learning outcomes or learning process) and “Action” (reviewing and revising the learning content and learning methods).

In terms of the school policies which will provide the support that children need in order to become self-directed learners, specific measures corresponding to each stage of the R-

PDCA are presented, alongside the following four initiatives which enhance the way students learn at home and propels the school to provide an environment that is conducive to learning.

Initiative 1: Compile a Handbook of Home Learning which is customized to each grade level; all teaching staff will provide instruction to their students based on a common understanding of this handbook.

Initiative 2: Conduct lessons in a way which maximizes the effectiveness of homework (including both preparatory learning and review of learning materials) while taking into account the specificities of the learning content, ensuring a connection between classroom lessons and home learning.

Initiative 3: Provide instruction on studying methods by making use of the handbook which presents information about the learning content, studying methods, time management, and note-taking methods.

Initiative 4: Understand what students seek to achieve through home learning and the problems they are facing, set up opportunities to have a dialogue with them and build a system of cooperation and collaboration.

With regard to “connections with students’ family members and people living in the community,” information regarding the attitude which adults should take is presented from three perspectives, namely “providing emotional support,” “creating an environment conducive to study,” and “forming good habits.” The key concepts here include communication, sense of security, environment that facilitates concentration, lifestyle habits like going to bed and waking up early or helping out with family chores, and creating rules. In addition, specific examples of what family members can say to their children when broaching these topics are also provided to allow family members to reflect on home learning together with students.

Similar to the lesson standards mentioned earlier, checklists are also created for home-learning in the same manner. The checklist includes categories such as “study habits,” “lifestyle habits,” “when to study,” “what to study,” and “how to study,” providing a perspective for self-reflection on studying at home and one’s own lifestyle. Time set aside for class activities is used for students to evaluate themselves, allowing students to become more aware of the issues that they need to resolve or improve on with appropriate support and guidance from teachers.

Case studies and examples on how students can practically learn to manage themselves are also provided, and these are important in getting students to develop the right attitude and relevant skills. An emphasis is placed on the efforts made by a particular elementary school in working hand-in-hand with family members of the students. In fact, the teachers in this school try to understand, through a survey targeted at guardians, the difficulties which family members face in terms of getting children to study at home.

Several issues emerge when putting the home-learning standard into practice. One of these is the necessity of an explicit handbook which caters to the realities which students are facing, and the specificities of each grade level in terms of encouraging them to study at home. Another is the need to ensure two-directional communication when collaborating

with family members of the students, so that the school is not unilaterally making decisions on these issues. For example, in the elementary school mentioned above, if parents comment that they do not have time to look over their children's homework, teachers may suggest that they "encourage their child to take on challenges independently" through class-family communication channels.

3. Curriculum Management and the Conditions Needed for Its Realization

(1) The Role of Organizational Structure

The conditions internal to the school which are necessary to realize curriculum management are organizational structure, school culture and leadership. Conditions that are external to the school would consist of two elements - school administration regarding the educational curriculum, and collaboration with family members of the students and people living in the community.

Organizational structure refers to factors such as people, material resources, finance, and information, which allow for the creation and implementation of the curriculum. Specifically, they include the following:

- People - role of human organizations such as student organizations (classes, grades, committees) and the systems of instruction in teaching organizations, members of the teaching staff including the principal, allocation of teaching staff, human resources in the region
- Material resources - adequacy of teaching materials and teaching aids as a physical organization, management of teaching equipment and teaching resources, effective use of infrastructure and facilities
- Finance - appropriate handling of the funds which are required for the operation of the organization such as running educational activities in schools, providing the necessary environment for learning, etc.
- Information - information about the conditions relating to students' daily lives and learning at school, profiles of teachers and their activities, connections with family members of students and with people living in the community, effective use of ICT
- Time - use of time such in allocating lesson hours, distribution of lesson periods, timetable scheduling, planning school events, managing working hours, ensuring sufficient time for training and development, etc.

All the above are necessary when it comes to managing an organization and ensuring an effective curriculum. In particular, the effective use of time, also known as time management, has recently garnered attention as an important component of transforming how schools function and operate, and this notion has permeated all education committees and schools, especially in recent years.

In June 2017, the Central Education Council published An Inquiry into Comprehensive Policies that Transform How Schools Work in order to Create a Sustainable Instructional and Operational System for Education in a New Era. This triggered subsequent documents from

MEXT, such as the Guidelines for Sports Club Activities/Cultural Club Activities (March 2018/December 2018) and the Guidelines Regarding Maximum Working Hours for Teachers in Public Schools (January 2019). In March 2019, MEXT also disseminated a circular entitled Thorough Implementation of Measures to Transform How Schools Work. In addition, the findings for the above-mentioned inquiry by the Central Education Council were released in January 2019, and a Revised Special Law was implemented which acknowledges the fact that teaching is a unique job that requires a modified working hours system.

The specific measures regarding labor reforms in schools, which take into account teachers' working hours and health management are as follows:

- Labor laws stipulate that managing the working hours of teaching staff is a responsibility of principals, education boards, and this must be thoroughly carried out.
- In principle, overtime work should be limited to a maximum number of 45 hours per month, and 360 hours per year. (Schools should aim to reduce the hours in which teachers stay in school below the stipulated numbers)
- The timetable of the students (the times that students attend school, times that students go home from school, time for club activities, etc.) should be determined taking into account the working hours of teachers.
- Using school assessment or self-assessment/evaluation by the education board (checklist to improve operations)
- For club activities, there should be at least 2 rest days put in place during term time (at least 1 rest day during weekdays, and at least 1 rest day during weekends. In the case that the club is participating in a major event during the weekend, there must be a rest day set aside in-lieu of the original weekend rest day)
- Club activities should not exceed 2 hours a day on a weekday, or 3 hours a day on days where there is no school (including weekends in the middle of the school term). Activities should be carried out reasonably and effectively and the number of hours taken up should be minimized as far as possible.

One must also not ignore the effects on curriculum management by the components of organizational structure mentioned above (people, material resources, information, etc.) other than time.

Another noteworthy point is the revival in some regions of the two-term system, which had largely fallen out of use in recent years. The two-term system divides a school year into two terms before and after fall, and there are cases where a fall holiday is put in place in between the two terms. Compared to the three-term system, there are fewer school events such as start-of-term and end-of-term ceremonies, and fewer term reports or termly communication with parents, which result in more breathing room for teachers and more flexibility in how lessons are arranged. This also allows for more contact time between teachers and students. These circumstances form the backdrop to the new set of Guidelines for Lesson and Instruction which was fully implemented in elementary schools from the 2020 academic year onwards. Elementary students in the fifth and sixth years of study are now expected to study

a foreign language, and this has resulted in an issue where it is difficult to ensure the 35 hours of instructional time per year that is required.

Because of this, the elementary school principal associations in some regions have shown a preference for a two-term system, but it is important to consider whether it will be feasible to gain the understanding of students guardians in this regard. It is crucial for the education boards to support the schools in their attempt to communicate the merits and advantages of implementing a two-term system.⁽¹¹⁾

In this way, it can be seen that the external components of organizational structure (educational administration and collaboration with family members of the students and people living in the community) can actively affect how the curriculum is managed in schools.

(2) The Role of School Culture

School culture also plays an important role as one of the school-internal factors of curriculum management. Generally, “school culture” refers to the shared mindsets or patterns of behavior, based on traditions and values which were gradually formed as teachers, students, guardians and professional school leaders work together to confront crises and manage outcomes. School culture is an amalgamation of the organizational culture shared by the teaching staff in a school, the student culture shared among the students, and the culture relating to the traditions that have taken root in a particular school. School culture and organizational structure, mentioned previously, can mutually affect one another.

The indicators of a positive school culture that contributes to effective PDCA cycles in the curriculum can be understood through the three aspects as follows: collegiality, innovativeness and self-discipline. It may be useful to check whether these aspects have taken root as a form of culture in the everyday life of the school.

1) Indicators for collegiality

- a. Is there an atmosphere that facilitates discussion among teachers of the same subject or school year (or even from different subjects and school years) regarding ideal forms and improvements to instructional content, instructional methods, and assessment of learning?
- b. Is there an atmosphere that facilitates creative effort from classroom teachers when performing relevant duties?
- c. Is there an atmosphere that enables the school to work together as a team when it comes to crisis management for students?

2) Indicators for innovativeness

- a. Is there an atmosphere that supports students in seeking to adapt to changes in their learning environment, while respecting existing ways of doing things?
- b. Is there an atmosphere that supports discussion at the organizational level regarding the effectiveness of the school and potential improvements?
- c. Is there an atmosphere that supports comprehensive and holistic engagement with struggling students in terms of learning and instruction?

3) Indicators for self-discipline

- a. Is there an atmosphere that enables teachers to be open about their conduct of lessons and

seek to learn from one another in a constructive manner?

- b. Is there an atmosphere in which students are encouraged, praised, and treated with fairness?
- c. Is there a safe, clean and orderly school environment, which allows students to settle down properly?

A school culture which is supported by collegiality, innovativeness and self-discipline, in the ways mentioned above, can be seen as a culture which believes that learning is valuable for everyone, a culture which seeks to nurture compassion and solidarity, supports the development of teachers, students and parents, promotes innovation and improvement, and is based on traditions and habits of recognizing and drawing attention to the true value and accomplishments of individuals.

(3) Mentoring and the Role of Leadership

Another component of the internal conditions which need to be realized is leadership. Leadership comprises three aspects - educational leadership, management/technical leadership and cultural leadership. Educational leadership drives educational activities directly through providing guidance and advice on the PDCA cycle of curriculum objectives. Management/technical leadership supports educational activities indirectly through equipping an organizational structure with the human and material resources that it needs. Cultural leadership seeks to positively change the human relationships within the organization, its instructional mindset and school spirit.

As an aside, school executives and school superintendents in the United States are currently expected to provide instructive leadership which has a direct connection to improving students' academic abilities. In professional standards such as the educational curriculum, instruction, and assessment, there is an expectation that "effective education leaders develop and support systems for the educational curriculum, instruction, and assessment which are intellectually rigorous and internally consistent, in order to facilitate successful learning in every student. In addition, [they are expected to] ensure equality in education opportunities, put in place education practices which are culturally sensitive and also create communities that are inclusive, compassionate and supportive."⁽¹²⁾

The concept of "servant leadership," postulated by Greenleaf R. K. in America in 1970, remains instructive in the present day, not just for principals, vice-principals and head teachers but also the those in intermediary positions who assist the school leaders in managing the school. Servant leadership refers to the act of leaders "serving and contributing to an organization in order to attain the organization's vision for the benefit of the followers." The following aspects of servant leadership can bring about a positive school culture and promote a compassionate work environment, affecting the curriculum's PDCA cycles in a beneficial way.

- a. Motivation (to serve), belief (in win-win relationships)
- b. Evidence of influence (building trusting relationships, respecting individuality)

- c. Communication style (listening)
- d. Ability to carry out duties (coaching, mentoring)
- e. Mindset towards responsibility (an environment which allows learning from failures)

If we think about this more deeply, the function of mentoring, which is a role played by education leaders to heighten the teachers' ability to carry out duties (i.e. item (d.) above), is meaningful both to less experienced teachers and veteran teachers alike. In the US state of Massachusetts, mentoring is incorporated systematically as a mandatory activity for newly appointed teachers, school executives, education administrators and superintendents. Given the issues confronting the education landscape in Japan where there is an increase in the number of younger teachers and a decrease in the number of middle-level teachers, it is time for us to directly engage with the issue of mentoring and coaching.

The purpose of incorporating a mentorship system is to prevent young teachers from leaving the workforce and to promote a culture that supports the development of human resources; this can be seen as a way to support management strategies. Mentorship systems have the following characteristics in relation to realizing the conditions for curriculum management:

Target: Every level in the organization

People who are assigned to be mentors: Those who are older, more experienced and hold more authority. (In the case of young teachers, having a senior who is diagonally above in the hierarchy of the system as the mentor (i.e. someone who is not their immediate superior but a more experienced colleague from a different department) can make it easier for information and mindsets to be transmitted between the mentor and the mentee)

Period: Long-term (1 year or more); continuous

Purpose: Helping mentors to acquire the relevant mentoring skills through coaching, guidance to both mentors and mentees, etc.

To ensure the smooth operation of the mentorship system, at the point where the initial stage of mentorship comes to an end, it is crucial that the mentor and the mentee conduct a communication check similar to the following:⁽¹³⁾

Communication Check for Mentors:

- a. Share with the mentee the goals of the mentoring after having a proper understanding of the purpose and objective of the mentoring system (the same applies to the mentee).
- b. Utilize the knowledge and skills which are essential for mentoring (coaching, counseling, etc.).
- c. Be mindful of providing support based on the mentee's needs instead of conducting mentoring in the way the mentor prefers.
- d. Actively listen to what the mentee is saying, and try to understand the needs of the mentee.
- e. Encourage the mentee through positive words and allow the mentee to be more self-aware through honest feedback.

- f. Notice the strengths of the mentee rather than their weaknesses.
- g. Create an open and candid atmosphere where it is easy to broach topics which would normally be difficult to talk about (assure the mentee of the confidentiality of the mentoring sessions).

Communication Check for Mentees:

- a. Treat the mentor as someone you can learn from, and not someone who will do something for you.
- b. Show the mentor that you are receptive and open to their feedback, opinions and advice.
- c. Don't neglect your commitments to the mentorship system because you are busy with work.
- d. Convey to the mentor in a candid manner what you want to say or what you hope the mentor will do. Actively create opportunities for communication.

From a leadership perspective, mentoring serves a purpose of transforming individual teachers' values and mindsets into something positive. At the same time, in terms of curriculum management practice, mentoring may help teachers to maintain the belief that students have the potential to grow through learning, and it also enhances educational objectives and curriculum PDCA cycles based on specialized knowledge, experience and results from practical research.

(Notes)

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